



LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr PS Russo MP—Chair
Mrs LJ Gerber MP (virtual)
Ms SL Bolton MP (virtual)
Ms JM Bush MP
Mr JE Hunt MP (virtual)
Mr JM Krause MP (virtual)

Staff present:

Mrs K O'Sullivan—Committee Secretary
Dr S Pruiam—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—INQUIRY INTO THE SUPPORT PROVIDED TO VICTIMS OF CRIME

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Friday, 5 May 2023

Brisbane

FRIDAY, 5 MAY 2023

The committee met at 11.03 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare open this public briefing for the committee's inquiry into the support provided to victims of crime. My name is Peter Russo. I am the member for Toohey and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose lands, winds and waters we all share. With me today are: Laura Gerber MP, member for Currumbin and deputy chair, via videoconference; Sandy Bolton MP, member for Noosa, via videoconference; Jonty Bush MP, member for Cooper; Jason Hunt MP, member for Caloundra, via videoconference; and Jon Krause MP, member for Scenic Rim, who will join us shortly via videoconference.

On 16 March, the Legislative Assembly agreed that this committee inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly on support provided to victims of crime in Queensland. The purpose of today's briefing is to assist the committee with its inquiry. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

These proceedings are similar to parliament and are subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. In this regard, I remind members of the public that, under the standing orders, the public may be admitted to or excluded from the briefing at the discretion of the committee. I also remind committee members that departmental officers are here to provide factual or technical information. Any questions seeking an opinion about policy should be directed to the Attorney-General or left to debate on the floor of the House.

These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask everyone present to turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode.

CLEARY, Ms Rosemary, Victim Liaison Coordinator, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions

CORLESS, Mr Dean, Executive Director, Justice Services, Department of Justice and Attorney-General

CUNNINGTON, Ms Brigita, Acting Deputy Director-General, Justice Services, Department of Justice and Attorney-General

FULLER, Mr Todd KC, Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions

KAY, Ms Sarah, Executive Director, Office of the Deputy Director-General, Justice Services, Department of Justice and Attorney-General

STEPHEN, Dr Kylie, Assistant Director-General, Office for Women and Violence Prevention, Department of Justice and Attorney-General

WEBBER, Ms Julie, Director, Victim Assist Queensland, Department of Justice and Attorney-General

WHELAN, Ms Helena, Acting Executive Manager, Financial Assistance Unit, Victim Assist Queensland, Department of Justice and Attorney-General

CHAIR: I now invite you to brief the committee, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

Ms Cunningham: Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide a further briefing to the committee regarding the activities of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General that relate to the committee's inquiry into support for victims of crime. I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the courage of the individuals who have shared their personal stories with the committee, providing valuable information regarding the experiences of victims in the Queensland criminal justice system.

I note the department provided the committee with a response to written submissions received on 24 April. The department acknowledges that many of the issues and experiences raised in submissions to this committee were also shared in recent years with the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce which informed their comprehensive reports to the Queensland government. A significant program of work is currently underway across government in response to the task force's recommendations to improve the experiences of victims of crime who engage with the criminal justice system.

I would like to take this opportunity to outline some of the task force reform work which is being led by DJAG and which is relevant to the issues being considered by this committee: the establishment of an appropriate model for a victims commissioner for Queensland that will promote and protect the interests of victims; a review by the victims commissioner of the Charter of Victims' Rights once the victims commissioner is established; relevant agencies, including DJAG, for the first time putting in their annual reports the number of charter complaints they received and how they were dealt with; the development and implementation of a pilot for a statewide professional victim advocate service for Queensland victims, the evaluation of which will consider whether there is a need for funded legal representation for victim-survivors of sexual violence during criminal justice processes; the exploration of options for a sustainable long-term plan for the expansion of the adult restorative justice services in Queensland; the development of an evidence-based, trauma informed framework to support domestic and family violence training, education and change management across all parts of the domestic and family violence and justice service systems; and the modernisation and digitalisation of Queensland's remote witness facilities including by expanding courts' videoconferencing enabled locations and the development and roll-out of a vulnerable witness evidence solution. This is by no means all the reform work currently being undertaken across the Queensland government—in DJAG and other government agencies—in response to those task force recommendations; however, it does represent some of the work that is most relevant to this committee.

As recommended by the task force, the reform work being undertaken by DJAG will continue to be informed by the voices of people with lived experience of the criminal justice system including, most importantly, victims. Since 2017 there has been a 90 per cent increase in applications to Victim Assist Queensland. Despite these significant increases, Victim Assist Queensland has effectively managed to reduce backlogs and wait times by streamlining assessment processes, engaging additional staff and improving systems. These efficiencies have contributed to a 251 per cent increase in the decisions made in March 2023 as compared to March last year.

As part of its response to youth crime, the Queensland government announced an additional \$9 million in funding over four years to support victims of violent crime which includes \$600,000 to undertake a review of the financial assistance model under the Victims of Crime Assistance Act. The department is in the process of commencing that review of the financial assistance scheme and will consider recommendations for change that will provide improved financial assistance services to victims of crime.

I would like to take this opportunity to correct a minor error in the information provided by the department in response to written submissions. In reference to the additional funding announced for the victim services funding program, the new funding of \$3 million will be allocated across four years, as opposed to the three years which was stated in the department's response. I apologise for this error.

The independent statutory review of the Human Rights Act which is to commence as soon as practicable after 1 July 2023 will consider whether victims' rights are appropriately protected under that act. Other activities that may improve the experience of victims includes the work of the Criminal Justice Innovation Office. This office has been established to identify, implement and support initiatives to reform the criminal justice system and improve community safety. Its initiatives to modernise Queensland's laws, reduce demand on courts and prisons, enhance diversionary programs and help break the cycle of reoffending are aimed at enhancing community wellbeing and improving safety. The Criminal Justice Innovation Office will consult with the community about its initiatives and ensure it is informed by the voices of people with lived experience of the justice system including victims.

I trust this information and the information provided in our written response to the submissions will assist the committee in identifying the significant work currently underway within the Queensland government to improve the experience of victims involved in the criminal justice system. I am joined by various departmental colleagues who are available to take questions regarding the work the department is currently undertaking to support victims of crime. I welcome any questions.

Mrs GERBER: I am happy for anyone who is most appropriate to answer the question. I apologise that I cannot see your names on the screen in front of me. I believe it was in 2016 or 2017 that the definition of 'act of violence' in the Victims of Crime Assistance Act was amended to essentially include domestic violence. That increased the volume of cases that Victim Assist Queensland was seeing. Can you tell me how many extra resources Victim Assist Queensland was given at that point in time? What was the budget increased by? How many full-time-equivalent employees were added at that time? I am not sure if any were, but I am interested in those numbers. The reason I ask that question is: if the current definition is expanded to include home invasions, how many additional resources will be given to deal with the volume that might come in as a result of that?

Mr Corless: In terms of the legislative amendments that commenced on 1 July 2017, the expansion to the definition of 'act of violence' was only one of a number of legislative amendments that contributed to a 46 per cent increase in applications for financial assistance. Those amendments also included reducing barriers for people applying for assistance, which mainly focused on the application form itself, and the expansion to the definition of 'act of violence' to include all forms of domestic and family violence. That has been a large part of the increase in applications since that time.

In terms of additional resourcing, we may need to take that question on notice in terms of providing the specific resourcing that has been made available since that time. At the commencement of those amendments the department was unable to quantify what any increase might look like because there were a raft of changes being implemented, so there was no additional resourcing made available at that point in time. However, government continued to monitor the impact to the financial assistance scheme. Since then there have been a number of additional full-time equivalents made available to Victim Assist Queensland, but those exact numbers and when they were made available I cannot tell you off the top of my head, I am sorry, and will need to take that on notice.

Mrs GERBER: I am happy for you to take it on notice. Looking back in history, then, and given the situation in relation to the timeliness of financial assistance being paid to victims of crime since the amendments to the Victims of Crime Assistance Act and the expansion, would you say that the increase in resources needs to happen at the time of the legislative change, given the backlog that is currently being faced and now having to be worked through? Would that be ideal?

Mr Corless: I suppose it is a bit hard being able to go back in time and it is always a difficult situation to model what might occur as a result of legislative changes. What we do know is that the number of victims that apply for financial assistance across the country is a very small number and any increase is hard to predict. I would say that if there were to be changes to the scheme to expand eligibility there would also need to be an increase in resourcing to be able to manage that.

Mrs GERBER: I was more directing that question towards expanding the scheme to include home invasions and ensuring there is resourcing given to VAQ at the time of that expansion so that we do not end up with the same situation that we are in now in relation to the timeliness of payouts. Thank you for that. I know that I canvassed this when we had our original briefing from DJAG, but I do not think I really got a clear figure in relation to the total to quantify the amount of financial assistance payouts that are currently in the system.

Ms Webber: Yes, we did provide in the written submission back the amount of payout—I just do not have it to hand today, but we did provide that to the committee—if all of the applications were to be paid out as of today.

Mrs GERBER: I will go back through and have a look at that. Could you come back to me, Chair?

Ms BOLTON: The oral submission made by the acting deputy director-general mentioned professional victims advocates. Across the hearings over the last few days we have heard of this desperate need for either a liaison person or somebody who can act almost as a one-stop reference point to follow up with the DPP and others and as a referral. Would the professional victims advocates do this? Also, in your submission you outlined that in 2017 there was a one-stop shop strategy office. We do not know where that portal is. The link provided goes to a research paper. Between that one-stop shop strategy and the professional victims advocates, is that almost going to meet what is being called for by victims and their families?

Dr Stephen: I can speak to the victim advocate role and proposal. A victim advocate is intended to provide individualised, culturally safe and trauma informed support to victims of sexual violence to assist them to navigate from point of first contact and then through the criminal justice system. The development of the pilot will be undertaken in consultation with people with lived experience, First Nations people and other service and legal system stakeholders. It is a model that is yet to be finalised or determined. In developing the pilot, we will need to consider how advocates can best support victims through individualised support and advice. This will include how advocates can support victims to access services to assist their recovery and help them to exercise their rights if they choose to engage with the criminal justice system. As part of that work, we will need to consider how the victim advocate would work in different locations across Queensland. I am not able to speak to the portal, but Dean may be able to.

Mr Corless: I thank the member for the question about the one-stop-shop initiative. The work conducted by the former one-stop-shop innovation office was to map the victim experience across Queensland, looking at the journey from point of act of violence through to accessing the victims register that is facilitated by Queensland Corrective Services. That work involves talking to victims across the state. A recommendation from that report was the development of a victims portal that would cover the entire victim journey. The relevant criminal justice agencies then undertook an exercise to develop a business case to map out and cost the development of a victims portal, and that work was conducted some years ago. That particular piece of work has not been funded, so that is why there has not been any further mention of a particular victims portal.

Ms BOLTON: Do we have any idea why it has not been funded or when it may be?

Mr Corless: That would be a question for government.

Ms BOLTON: Kylie, why have the professional victims advocates been restricted to victims of sexual violence and not made available to other victims of violence?

Dr Stephen: The victims advocacy model was a recommendation of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce's report 2, which focused on women and girls as victims of sexual assault and/or women as offenders in the criminal justice system. The recommendation, as I understand it, relates specifically to victims of sexual assault, but I would think that through consultation, when that commences, stakeholders may express views about the scope of the model.

Ms BUSH: I have disclosed and declared before that prior to coming into parliament I worked quite considerably in the justice services space, so I have certainly had a professional working relationship with many of the people here with us today and that probably makes me a little bit biased in many ways in that I do think that Queensland, when it comes to dealing with victims of crime, does have quite a progressive and fulsome way in which we do that. That said, we can always do better and I think we have heard through this inquiry that there is some opportunity to do some things a bit differently. I am also cognisant that there is such a transformative piece coming in behind, so how do we leverage that to help other victims? What we have heard in this inquiry and what we hear in our electorate offices is that there are general victims of crime—men who are assaulted in the Valley who also need help with navigating the system and finding information and working out where their matter is up to. Do you see opportunities in the package sitting behind you that is coming in to improve victim services responses generally? That is a very broad question and I have no idea who wants to take that on.

Ms Cunnington: I think all of the transformation that is happening across the system will benefit all victims in some measure. As Kylie Stephen has mentioned, that victim advocacy pilot will be used to inform, and stakeholders can give feedback in relation to what that looks like. I am sure government would, as it usually does, consider all of the issues as it looks to roll out pilots and expand services over time. If you think about all of the work that we have put in just in terms of improving, say, the trauma informed approach at VAQ, that assists all victims. It does not matter. I do not think VAQ differentiates in terms of the service it provides to victims who are eligible for the system. I will hand over to Dean in case he wants to add anything to that.

Mr Corless: I agree with Brigita's statement that Victim Assist Queensland does not change the way it provides assistance to different types of victims. I think, however, that historically the majority of victims who did access compensation or financial assistance were victims of assaults and sexual offences and obviously also families impacted by homicide. However, that has significantly changed, particularly since 2017, with a significant increase in victims of domestic and family violence accessing financial assistance. Victim Assist Queensland is regularly conducting sessions with the broader community to promote its services. That has existed since the commencement of the scheme in 2009.

Victim Assist Queensland also has staff based in regional locations that have a role to build capacity of service providers in those regions and to also promote and communicate and assist people to apply for financial assistance.

Ms BUSH: I will come to you, Kylie, in a minute about that piece because I am interested in it, but I have a couple of other questions. Trauma informed practice has come up consistently through the hearings, and I know that the relevant departments invest time in training officers in that, but it almost feels like something needs to be embedded within the system itself. Brigita, you mentioned there is a piece of work happening in that area. Can you tell us a little bit more about that and the time frames around that and where we anticipate we might start to feel the difference of that on the ground?

Ms Cunnington: There is a range of different work happening in different parts of the system. In terms of Court Services Queensland's response to the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce recommendations, we have recently finalised a procurement process to engage an external supplier to develop a trauma informed and intersectional training strategy for Court Services. The supplier will be commencing consultation and development of the domestic and family violence training and change management strategy in the coming weeks. Pending confirmation of time frames with the supplier, it is anticipated that development of the strategy will be finalised in the second half of 2023, with training solutions rolled out in early 2024. Once the strategy is finalised, socialised with staff across Court Services and community justice services within the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, it will be published and accessible on the department's intranet pages.

This recommendation has a dependency on recommendation 23 from report 1 of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce regarding the whole-of-system domestic and family violence training framework, which Kylie will be able to speak to, and that being finalised and socialised and published across the sector. This is the very first time that we have rolled out this kind of training to court staff. I think it is going to be a game changer in terms of supporting our court staff on the front line managing very challenging situations and responding to people who are experiencing very difficult situations and in distress. That is a real game changer and the first time it has ever happened in courts. I will let Kylie speak about the broader DV training framework and perhaps Dean would like to take a focus on Victim Assist Queensland trauma informed work that is happening.

Dr Stephen: Recommendation 23 of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce report 1 recommended the development of an evidence-based, trauma informed framework to support domestic and family violence training, education and change management across all parts of the system—that is, both the service delivery system and the justice system. It was to be informed by the voices of people with lived experience and developed in collaboration with the sector, academia and policing.

The framework, as Brigita said, will guide the development of new training. It will enable existing training modules to be reviewed against, I guess, a set of principles and standards. It will ensure consistency of understanding of issues, including what it means to be trauma informed, and the responses, including to sexual violence that might occur within a domestic and family violence context. The training will be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains contemporary and will consider issues that commonly arise throughout relevant complaints processes, including in relation to the victims' charter as part of the review process. That work is being done in conjunction with the work that Brigita spoke about. It is due to commence with their onboarding of the supplier through the procurement process.

Mr Corless: From a Victim Assist Queensland perspective, from January to July 2022 Victim Assist completed a project to develop a framework to implement and embed trauma informed practice into the organisation. The framework covers four domains including governance, management and leadership; policy and procedures; direct services to victims; and a healthy and effective workforce. Implementing and embedding a trauma informed approach is a priority in Victim Assist's 2022-23 business plan, and the trauma informed principles of safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and diversity have been adopted as the organisation's values.

The completion of training in trauma informed practice is mandatory for all Victim Assist Queensland staff. In 2022, all the VAQ leaders completed specific trauma informed leadership training. A number of Victim Assist Queensland policies have also been amended, resulting in a more beneficial approach being taken to the assessment of financial assistance applications. Victim Assist Queensland also amended many of its forms and other communication resources to ensure they are trauma informed and easier to understand.

Ms BUSH: Dean, I heard you mention that policy analysis will obviously be a part of that training. What we have heard is that it is a bit more than training, and I know that you know that. It is looking at the systems. It is people getting a notification about a non-payment out of the blue, without a phone call. It is that stuff. What is going to be cleaned up in that space, do you think, from the training?

Mr Corless: The work is really in terms of how Victim Assist Queensland is engaging with victims and how they make their decision-making. We also recognise that there is more work to happen in that space, and the review of the financial assistance scheme that is going to be undertaken in the next few months will have a trauma informed lens as well. That will look at what are some of the other improvements that need to happen to the system rather than looking at the operational processes and forms. There is significant work that has happened in mindset and how the VAQ staff think about the work they do. The key work that has happened to date is to really embed those values with the people. Obviously, as you would probably be aware, making systemic changes takes time and so that is the work that is still to be done.

Ms BUSH: The review is kicking off in the next few months?

Mr Corless: That is correct.

Ms BUSH: And will be finished by—

Mr Corless: December.

Mrs GERBER: My question flows on from what the member for Cooper just asked. On VAQ's decision-making processes, we heard from a number of service providers that their clients have experienced inconsistent decision-making processes out of VAQ. In particular, we heard from Di Macleod that, while she recognised that no two assaults were the same, despite the crimes being relatively similar one victim-survivor was granted financial assistance to change the locks or to buy security devices for the home and another victim-survivor was denied that in circumstances where the service provider considered it to be comparable or very similar. Can you tell the committee how VAQ staff make their decisions? Is it just a staff member making a decision based on the file that is in front of them? Can you talk us through that process?

Mr Corless: In terms of the decision-making that the Victim Assist Queensland assessors do, obviously they are foremost guided by the legislation. Then there are also guidelines that are issued by the chief executive in accordance with VoCA and there is also a table of costs approved by the chief executive. Sitting under that are the organisation's policies and procedures.

I would like to acknowledge that every victim's experience and situation is different and assessors do need to make a decision based on the information that is available to them and in front of them. In terms of touching on the previous comment from the member for Cooper, when looking at a trauma informed approach that means not taking a cookie-cutter approach where the organisation is making the same decision in every situation.

We do acknowledge that there are circumstances where there may be cases that appear to be very similar but may have different outcomes. There is also the possibility that decisions may have been separated by time and in that time there may have been guidelines that have been updated and approved by the chief executive or policies and procedures may have changed. We do acknowledge that that does have an impact on victims and that service providers would be the ones that would see that the most as they have been engaged with victims over many years applying to Victim Assist Queensland.

Mr KRAUSE: I have a question for both parties, but particularly DJAG. It relates to various statements made in this session. The department has referred to—and it is quite obviously the correct approach—listening to voices of people who have lived experience as victims of crime. We have heard a lot about that in the past couple of weeks.

CHAIR: Jon, I am sorry to interrupt. We are having a little trouble hearing you. I do not know if you can improve that or not. I have no problem with you starting again.

Mr KRAUSE: I will try to fix that. We have heard a lot of about listening to voices of people with lived experience as victims of crime. We have heard a lot about that in our inquiry. In the past two weeks there has been a hearing on this almost every day. In Ipswich, one thing that really struck me was the statement of a victim of crime that the criminal justice process was almost as bad as the crime committed against her. In light of that, have both the department and the ODPP had the opportunity to review all the transcripts from our public hearings in the past couple of weeks?

Ms Kay: I am afraid the *Hansard* has not been available to us. We have followed along with media reports and we have been reviewing the transcripts that have been available. As you know, your regional processes were not live streamed so we could not watch and the *Hansard* has not come through. As soon as the *Hansard* is available, all of the officers here will be reviewing it.

Mr KRAUSE: I assume the answer is the same from the ODPP?

Mr Fuller: We have not reviewed those. I can indicate that we conduct surveys, so we give opportunities for victims of crime, following the completion of a prosecution, to complete an anonymous survey for us where they answer a number of categories with respect to our dealings with them and their views of the outcome of the matter. Those surveys are reviewed on a fortnightly basis and circulated amongst all of our staff so that they are aware of the impact their dealings have had on people.

The second thing is that we obviously receive a number of complaints, which are handled at the directorate level. It is my responsibility, with respect to that, to meet with victims, to respond to their complaints and queries and, where there are systemic issues within our office, to promulgate that across so that our staff are made aware of the impact of what they are doing. Secondly, if there are process issues or individuals where we need to address their interactions with victims of crime then we do that as well.

Mr KRAUSE: It is pleasing to hear that the ODPP undertakes that process. Obviously we cannot ask you questions about what we have heard in our inquiry if you have not had the opportunity to review that material, and that is an issue with this committee's process. I also wanted to ask about the written reply to submissions supplied by both the department and the ODPP, which indicated that a more fulsome response to the written public submissions to our inquiry was not possible in the time frame that you were given. Are you intending to provide more fulsome submissions to the committee about the written submissions given that more time has now elapsed or are the written submissions you previously provided going to be the final response to the submitters' written submissions?

CHAIR: Jon, the committee process would allow us to write to the department and raise issues that the committee thought were relevant to our inquiry and that may not have been addressed. I will hand over to the witness.

Ms Cunningham: We were not proposing to provide further response but, as indicated by Mr Russo, we would be very happy to take any questions from the committee.

Mr KRAUSE: Thank you for that. I am referring to your own written submissions, which indicate they were not as fulsome as possible given the time frame. It may be that we do have some extra matters we want to raise with you, but that is a matter for the committee. I have a question in relation to Legal Aid resources. One of the lived experiences of a victim of crime that we heard about, again in Ipswich, was that he was \$126,000 'in the hole'—that was the way he put it—fighting a custody battle against the convicted killer of his grandchild's mother. The convicted killer received legal aid but he did not. I want to ask if DJAG, in particular, can give us their view or any information about how Legal Aid might be able to be utilised to assist victims of crime. I should add that one of the things for many victims is the need for some legal support to navigate the process. How can Legal Aid add to that?

CHAIR: Jon, I do not know whether Legal Aid funding is within the remit of DJAG. It is a separate process.

Mr KRAUSE: It sits under DJAG. Surely it is part of their department.

CHAIR: It may not be.

Mr KRAUSE: I am pretty sure it is.

CHAIR: Well, it is not. I will be blunt. The way legal aid is disbursed is straight from the Legal Aid office. Who they decide to give aid to and who they do not is a matter for them. It is not the department's responsibility. That is where I am coming from.

Mr KRAUSE: Doesn't Legal Aid Queensland report to the Attorney-General? I am happy to be corrected.

Ms Cunningham: Legal Aid sits within the justice portfolio but the Department of Justice and Attorney-General is not responsible for the way that the Legal Aid Commission administers its funding. That question would need to be directed to Legal Aid Queensland.

Mr KRAUSE: Thank you.

Ms BOLTON: I want to ask about restorative justice practices. Across the hearings we heard a lot of really good things, but we heard that it is not available everywhere. Can you advise why it seems to be centralised but also what evaluations are done on those and the outcomes of those evaluations?

Mr Corless: Resourcing for adult restorative justice conferencing case management is approximately 4.4 full-time-equivalents across four current locations where the service is available—Brisbane, Gold Coast, Townsville and Cairns—with 1.8 of those full-time-equivalents being based in

Brisbane. With a recommended case load of 15 to 20 cases per convenor, the referral finalisation for adult restorative justice conferencing matters is currently 65 days. However, complex matters are currently taking close to six months on average to finalise due to the high volume of cases, increasing complexity of matters referred and the limited resources to provide the service.

The time taken to complete referrals is extended on the Gold Coast and Brisbane due to their volume and backlog. In response to recommendations from the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, the government has commenced work on a sustainable long-term plan for the expansion of restorative justice in Queensland. Recommendation 90 of report 2 of the task force recommended that the government commence that work immediately. Whilst funding for the project does not commence until 1 July 2023, DJAG's Dispute Resolution Branch has embarked on the planning and procurement for this project in readiness for its commencement.

Ms BOLTON: Does it have any restrictions, given that it came from the women's task force?

Mr Corless: In terms of service delivery restrictions, no. That recommendation is purely in regard to the expansion of the service to be made available throughout the state. There is also a recommendation that relates to the establishment of a pilot or a trial of restorative justice for sexual violence matters and domestic and family violence matters. That will be undertaken in future. The pilot for that is due to commence in July 2026.

Ms BOLTON: Is there any reason for the delay for the rollout of that pilot?

Mr Corless: My understanding is that the delay for the rollout of the pilot is to give time for the expansion work to occur.

Ms BUSH: I think that is right. Certainly we have heard about the desperate need for victims to have alternative access to justice models, and restorative justice is one of those. One of the issues that came up was that people are not even aware that that is an option. Will the expansion and the work that is happening there around looking at a more sustainable, fulsome model look at referral pathways and introducing that concept earlier into a victim's journey?

Mr Corless: As part of the expansion process, there will be consideration as to how referrals are made into the adult restorative justice conferencing program. There is a further recommendation from the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce that calls on government to implement a specific legislative framework that sits around adult restorative justice conferencing. It is likely that in developing that framework there would be considerations as to how to potentially legislate referral processes in a similar way to how youth justice conferencing is legislated in Queensland.

Ms BUSH: That is great. I look forward to seeing how it goes. Can we talk about crime scene clean-up? I know that Victim Assist has introduced a new method of managing that in relation to homicides. Can you talk a little bit about that? Then I might talk to police a bit further about that.

Ms Webber: Since December last year we have been liaising with the homicide squad in QPS and our funded organisation Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group. We now have a clear referral process where, when homicide occurs, the QPS sends the referral to Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group, who then will be the ones responsible for looking after the arrangements for the crime scene clean-up. We acknowledge that this is an issue that needs to be addressed very quickly. It is often difficult to ascertain who the owner of the property is, whether it is a tenant or the victim et cetera.

To keep things simple, where the aftermath of a homicide needs to be cleaned up in a home, Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group will obtain quotes from service providers to come and do that job. We used to fund that by an application through the financial assistance scheme. We have now taken money away from the administered fund and we have given it by means of brokerage funding to Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group. They will simply pay the invoice for that. It means that victims do not have to get involved in the arrangement of the crime scene clean-up or in the payment of those invoices. That is working very well.

Ms BUSH: Are they still drawing down from the victim's application for that?

Ms Webber: No. We have taken it outside the victim's application.

Mrs GERBER: I wanted to go back to VAQ and the time that victims of crime are waiting for a financial assistance payout. Is there a reason the threshold criteria for fast-tracking financial payments are not publicly available? In asking that question, I draw your attention to page 5 of the submission of Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence. Have you had a chance to read that submission?

Ms Webber: In terms of urgent applications, we do prioritise funeral payments where homicides have occurred. We currently process them within an average of 21 days for those to be decided. The other priority applications that we deal with are those applications that come through the high-risk teams. We do have representatives on all the high-risk teams across Queensland. They are the applications that receive high priority within the scheme at the moment. It is currently taking 57 days for a decision for a high-risk team application.

Mrs GERBER: That criteria is not publicly available; is that right?

Ms Webber: I do not believe so.

Mr Corless: The Victims of Crime Assistance Act has provisions for the granting of interim assistance. A victim can apply for that. In terms of the criteria for high-risk team applications, they are obviously victims who are going through the high-risk teams across the state. What I would also like to mention in terms of the time to make a decision on an application is that there has been significant work in Victim Assist to reduce time frames. In the first quarter of 2022-23 it was taking on average 390 days for an application to be decided. In the third quarter it was down to 300 days. What is important to flag, though, is that once an application has made its way to an assessor the average time for a decision is only 34 days. Unfortunately, the main cause of the delay is for applications while they are waiting to be allocated to an assessor for decision.

Mrs GERBER: I have one further question that is best directed to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. How many cases does each of your victim liaison officers currently have and how many victim liaison officers do you have per victim of crime? However you need to break that down—whether it is by financial year. I am not sure how your systems break that down.

Mr Fuller: We have a number of chamber groups into which our office is broken up. We have a group of lawyers, administrative assistants and a victim liaison officer attached to that group. The work that is received into the office is divided amongst those chambers based on the amount of work that we receive in any given time. We have 19 victim liaison officers across the state and we have two coordinators, one of whom is sitting next to me. In Brisbane we have eight. Therefore, we have 11 regional ones.

In a number of our chambers we have two victim liaison officers. We divide our numbers up not by cases but by the number of victims we are supporting. We do not follow strictly what the act requires with respect to who we provide information to. Family groups will nominate other people that they wish us to provide information to. They may also nominate support agencies that they wish for us to supply information to, so it is a much broader net. On average per chamber per victim liaison officer, they are managing 467 victim groups with respect to matters.

To put that into perspective, you have to look at the fact that we have about 7,000 matters come into our office per year. Not all of those matters involve victims. There is a time when matters will take 18 months to two years to go through the criminal justice system. The amount of information or responses that are being provided at any given time is obviously staggered—they are not required to provide information to 467 people every day—but, as matters proceed through the system, information and engagement with those 467 people needs to be managed by each of the victim liaison officers at that time. That obviously ebbs and flows with court events occurring and updating them with respect to that and other things that occur. For example, an appeal may take place sometimes years after a conviction has occurred. We will then re-engage with the victim and the group listed on our SharePoint document with respect to that to update them with the information and then support them through the appeal process when it occurs.

Mrs GERBER: Just to give some context to my question, one of the key issues that has been raised throughout this inquiry is the timeliness of communication throughout the court process. It is not a criticism of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Are you satisfied that that case load is appropriate for each of your victim liaison officers or are they stretched?

Mr Fuller: I will not comment about the appropriate nature of it. What I will say is that we have responsibilities to provide information to all of the people who come into our office as victims and in those groups. As I indicated, our workflow ebbs and flows. I describe our office as a funnel. We have a resource. The amount of pressure under which we are put is dependent upon other parts of the system. If a lot of people are arrested, if a lot of people have progressed through the Magistrates Court, then a lot of files turn up in our office and we have to relate and deal with that. To give you an example of those ebbs and flows, if there is a multiple homicide that may result in us having to inform hundreds of people with respect to the circumstances as they occur. With regard to the ability to predict or control that, we are looking at technology assisting us with respect to that and maintaining that.

With respect to the timeliness of information, I can indicate that we have time lines with respect to providing information within 24 or 48 hours of an event occurring. Our life is a little bit harder now with technology such that journalists are tweeting things from the courtroom before we have an opportunity to speak to the person that we want to provide the information to, and we are attempting to deal with that as best we can as well.

Mrs GERBER: Do they need more resources or not?

CHAIR: That is a policy question, is it not?

Mr Fuller: It is.

CHAIR: Witnesses are not required to answer policy questions. That can be directed to the appropriate people either during the debate or directly to the Attorney-General. That brings to a conclusion this part of the briefing. I understand there was one question taken on notice—and correct me if I do not have this correct—with regard to additional resources provided to DJAG since the 2017 expansion of the Victims of Crime Assistance Act.

Mr Corless: That is correct, Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you, Dean. I ask that the answer to that question be provided to the secretariat by close of business on 11 May so that we can include it in our deliberations. If there are any issues with time lines, please communicate directly with the secretariat. Thank you, everyone, for attending and thank you for your indulgence for starting at 11 o'clock.

DWYER, Acting Superintendent Mel, Domestic, Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Command, Queensland Police Service

HYDE, Ms Sarah, Assistant Commissioner, Specialist Operations, Queensland Corrective Services

MOORE, Ms Michelle, Director, Serious Offenders Unit, Specialist Operations, Queensland Corrective Services

MORROW, Detective Acting Chief Superintendent Craig, Crime and Intelligence Command, Queensland Police Service

PARK, Inspector Ian, Prosecutions Service, Queensland Police Service

CHAIR: I now welcome witnesses from the Queensland Police Service and Queensland Corrective Services to brief the committee. As outlined earlier, I will ask Acting Chief Superintendent Morrow to start with his opening submission and then we will hear from Sarah before we go into questions.

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to brief the committee in relation to the inquiry into support for victims of crime. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Turrbal and Yagara people. I pay my respect to their elders past, present and emerging.

I thank the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee for undertaking this important work to promote better coordination of statewide services to ensure victims receive trauma informed, victim-centric and timely support. The Queensland Police Service supports these aims which align to the Queensland Police Service strategic and operational plan commitments. I would like to thank the various community groups and organisations for providing submissions to the committee on this inquiry. I would also like to acknowledge the victim-survivors and their families who have shared their stories in both the public submissions and the public hearings held in recent weeks.

The Queensland Police Service recognises the significant trauma experienced by victim-survivors in retelling their experiences and is committed to reducing the harm caused to victims as they navigate the criminal justice system. I note that the regional public hearings were not broadcast and that the Queensland Police Service has not yet been able to access the transcript from those hearings. I note that the committee received 54 submissions and that the Queensland Police Service has provided a departmental response to the key issues that were raised. I note that a further three submissions were published after this response. Issues raised reflect the Queensland Police Service investigations, police referrals, restorative justice processes, police engagement with victims and recognising individual needs, as well as providing specialised training. The Queensland Police Service appreciates these issues being raised and is continually looking at ways to better assist victims.

It is important to reiterate some of the key activities the Queensland Police Service is undertaking to improve responses to victims of crime. The Queensland Police Service's victim-centric approach to policing is supported by the Prevention Together Strategic Framework 2021-2024. The framework emphasises the importance of intervention strategies to prevent victimisation and ultimately reduce crime and harm to the community. As part of this, the Queensland Police Service has developed the Victim Response Framework, which aims to reduce harm by preventing repeat victimisation and revictimisation. The framework involves victim triaging to enable tailored communication and service delivery responses. It also enables the provision of standardised and consistent information to victims regarding crime prevention advice, support and referral options. This is supported by the Queensland Police Service Repeat Victimisation Dashboard, which provides a mechanism to direct prevention interventions to support those identified as most at risk of victimisation. Police are able to use the dashboard to monitor repeat victimisation rates for both personal and property offences, and use this information for place and case management.

The videorecorded evidence trial is currently underway in the Ipswich and Gold Coast districts. The trial intends to better support victims of crime by allowing victim statements to be recorded electronically and in a familiar environment such as the home. This prevents victims from having to provide multiple recounts of their experiences, minimising the potential for retraumatisation.

The Queensland Police Service Sexual Violence Response Strategy 2021-2023 outlines our commitment to deliver victim-centric and trauma informed responses to victims of sexual violence. In January 2022, the Queensland Police Service sexual violence liaison officer network was rolled out

across Queensland. The sexual violence liaison officer role is to assign a specialist officer to investigate complaints of sexual violence to ensure a victim-centric response. This role also includes engagement and referral to support services to identify and address issues relating to victim experiences and ensure accurate and consistent communication is provided to victims.

Importantly, the Queensland Police Service will continue to work closely with government and non-government partners to ensure a coordinated and collaborative response to victims of crime. The Queensland Police Service is also currently supporting the delivery of a number of key recommendations stemming from recent reports and inquiries, including the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce reports 1 and 2 and the commission of inquiry into policing responses to domestic and family violence. These include training for all staff, implementing processes for giving information to victims and continuous improvement to investigative responses to sexual violence.

In closing, I thank the committee for inviting the Queensland Police Service to assist with this inquiry and look forward to the committee's final report to better support victims of crime in Queensland. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Assistant Commissioner Hyde: Good afternoon, Chair and members of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee. Thank you for the opportunity for Queensland Corrective Services to address the committee in relation to the inquiry into the support provided to victims of crime. My name is Sarah Hyde and I am the Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations within Queensland Corrective Services and I am joined today by my colleague Ms Michelle Moore who is the Director of the serious offenders group within Specialist Operations. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that we meet on today and pay my respects to elders past and present as they are the custodians of cultural knowledge of the land, sea and waterways, and in the spirit of reconciliation we walk the journey together. I further extend that acknowledgement to all First Nations people who are present today.

Queensland Corrective Services takes pride in supporting community safety across Queensland. QCS is responsible for the humane detention, supervision and rehabilitation of adult offenders in Queensland. This includes accommodating over 10,000 prisoners across 11 high-security correctional centres, six low-security correctional centres and 13 prisoner work camps. Further, QCS has community corrections officers across the state, totalling 36, and more than 130 reporting locations dispersed across seven regions. Currently, we oversee the supervision and rehabilitation of over 18,700 adult offenders within the community.

As part of Queensland Corrective Services' role in the criminal justice system, the Corrective Services Act 2006 establishes the Queensland Corrective Services' Victims Register. Before I delve into the detail about the role and function and nuances of the complex nature of the work they undertake within the victims register unit, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the staff for the work that they do. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the highly sensitive and at times rather confronting nature and volume of the material that is received by our staff within the unit. The care, compassion and attention that each of our staff members provides to eligible victims day in, day out is duly noted and very appreciated.

Within the framework of services that support victims in Queensland, the victims register is established under section 320 of the Corrective Services Act. Whilst our victims register does not provide support services or financial services for victims, it is an essential service for eligible victims to access information about important events in the sentences of adult prisoners they are registered against. In our experience within QCS, no one victim experience is the same. For some victims, they will want to know when all of these events happen about a prisoner. For others, however, registering on the victims register as an eligible person and being informed of events relating to a prisoner can be retraumatizing.

A requirement for a victim to register with the victims register to receive certain information about a prisoner aims to provide autonomy and empowerment to the eligible person. This includes the type of information received by an eligible person and how it is received. For example, when registering with the victims register, an eligible person may nominate another entity to receive information on their behalf. This could well be a friend or a family member or an organisation such as our colleagues within the Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group. By enabling information to go to the eligible person's nominee, an eligible person can ensure appropriate supports are in place particularly when receiving information about a prisoner that may well be distressing or retraumatizing.

Under the act, a person may apply to be registered as an eligible person on the victims register to receive information about an adult prisoner serving a sentence for a violent or sexual offence, a prisoner subject to a supervision order or interim supervision order under the Dangerous Prisoners Brisbane

(Sexual Offenders) Act 2003, or in circumstances where there are risks of domestic and family violence by the prisoner. A person who may apply to be registered as an eligible person can be the actual victim of the offence or, if the victim is deceased, an immediate family member of the deceased victim, or, if the victim is under 18 years or has a legal incapacity, the victim's parent or guardian, or another person who gives QCS documentary evidence of the prisoner's history and violence against them or satisfies QCS that their life or physical safety could reasonably be expected to be endangered because of the connection between the person and the offence. The act enables an applicant to nominate an entity to receive prisoner information on their behalf; for example, a victim support agency. The act does not provide for a person to register against a prisoner on remand or on bail or where the perpetrator is charged with new offences and has not yet been convicted. If it is decided it is in the child's best interest, children can also be registered, or a parent or guardian may register, to receive the prisoner information for that said child.

Through the victims register, eligible persons who are registered against sentenced prisoners are kept up to date and informed about important events that may affect their safety and have the opportunity to participate in the parole process and, if relevant, the Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act process. Once a person is registered as an eligible person on the victims register, they are entitled to receive certain information.

Under section 324A of the act, QCS must provide the eligible person with: the prisoner's eligibility dates for, or date of, discharge or release; the fact and date of the death or escape of the prisoner; any particular circumstances relating to the prisoner that could reasonably be expected to endanger the eligible person's life or physical safety—for example, the prisoner is mistakenly discharged before their discharge date; and, for a no-body no-parole prisoner, whether a no-cooperation declaration is in force for the prisoner.

QCS must also advise an eligible person when the prisoner has made an application for parole, other than exceptional circumstances parole, and, as well, provide the eligible person with information to make a submission to the Parole Board Queensland. Involvement of a registered eligible person is an essential consideration for parole decisions made by the board. Additionally, where an eligible person is registered against a prisoner or offender who falls under the Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act 2003, Queensland Corrective Services is required to inform an eligible person of a hearing for an application under the act, providing an opportunity for the eligible person to make a submission to the Supreme Court. In making a submission, an eligible person is able to advise the board or the court about safety concerns they have in relation to a prisoner's release and can request a particular condition or conditions such as a requirement for a prisoner not to have any contact, whether that be indirect or direct contact, with them. These processes assist eligible persons with their safety planning and empower their involvement in decisions that may impact on their safety which is essential for supporting victims and preventing retraumatisation.

In addition, under section 325 of the Corrective Services Act, QCS has discretion to release other information about a prisoner the eligible person is registered against if it is considered appropriate. This includes the prisoner's current location, the prisoner's security classification, the prisoner's transfer between corrective services facilities or transfer interstate or overseas, the length of the term of imprisonment and any further cumulative terms of imprisonment imposed on the prisoner whilst in custody, the results of any parole application by the prisoner, or other exceptional events relating to the prisoner.

QCS, within the victims register context, is not required to notify an eligible person if a prisoner has made an exceptional circumstances parole. A prisoner may apply for an exceptional circumstances parole order at any time during their sentence, including prior to their parole eligibility date. The circumstances which lead to a prisoner making an application for exceptional circumstances parole are often prompted by a prisoner suffering a serious medical condition or other exceptional circumstance that has become apparent with very limited notice for the prisoner. The PBQ determines whether the prisoner's exceptional circumstances parole application meets the ministerial guidelines to the Parole Board Queensland for exceptional circumstances parole release. Depending on the individual circumstances, consideration of a prisoner's exceptional circumstances parole application by the board could be required to occur incredibly quickly; for example, where a person is terminally ill or incapacitated or imminently dying. Exceptional circumstances parole is only granted by the Parole Board Queensland in limited circumstances, and when deciding any parole application the highest priority for the board is the safety of the community. Should the board decide to grant exceptional circumstances parole, an eligible person registered on the victims register against that prisoner will be informed by QCS.

Undertaking the important work of the victims register are six full-time-equivalent positions, managing 1,720 eligible persons as at 21 April 2023. To promote awareness of the victims register, staff proactively provide stakeholder information sessions to other government agencies and victim support services. In addition, the Queensland government website provides information to victims in relation to their rights and their complaints. The website informs victims and includes information about the register including who is eligible, what types of information are given, how to apply and the confidentiality provisions that apply to the information given.

The number of new applications received and new eligible person registrations has continued to significantly increase each financial year. Acknowledging that an eligible person can be registered against multiple offenders, the total number of prisoners and offenders with a registered victim currently is 1,489. This consists of 902 prisoners in custody and 587 offenders in the community. For additional context, in the current financial year the staff of the victims register processed a total of 896 new applications, resulting in 627 new eligible person registrations on the register. The number of new applications received in the current financial year is projected to have increased from 29 per cent from 2021-22. Sixty-five per cent of these new applications were linked to domestic and family violence.

Queensland Corrective Services is committed to providing a valuable service to victims and to continuing to enhance the user experience of the victims register, in collaboration with partner agencies. In particular, QCS has an established relationship and information-sharing processes in place with Parole Board Queensland. This includes a receipt of automated information from the board about a prisoner's application for parole, ensuring Queensland Corrective Services is well placed to keep eligible persons informed of relevant parole decisions.

Queensland Corrective Services is committed to providing a valuable information service to eligible persons and to enhancing the systems that provide the delivery of information to victims with an eligible person's consent. Whilst the VR has a specific role in relation to interactions certain victims have with the criminal justice system, we work alongside other relevant partner agencies, including the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and indeed our colleagues beside us, the Queensland Police Service. This includes enhancing information sharing, with a person's consent, between the victims register and the victim liaison unit and seeking the views of the victim's experience through victim service providers, including our colleagues within the Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group.

In conclusion, QCS will continue to deliver on the legislative requirements to provide eligible persons registered on the victims register with key information about prisoners they are registered against and support their involvement in the parole application process or Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act process where they wish to be involved. Again, on behalf of Queensland Corrective Services, we thank you, Chair and committee, for your time and we would certainly welcome any questions.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mrs GERBER: I start by thanking both organisations for the work their officers do. It cannot be easy being frontline officers. I know that they put our community first every single day. To the Queensland Police Service, we heard from victims of crime some really positive stories about investigating officers really taking up the mantle for those victims of crime, supporting them through it and giving them information. Were you able to tune in to the hearing in Ipswich?

CHAIR: No, it was not broadcast.

Mrs GERBER: I will then explain it to you. I am sorry, Chair; it means my question will have a bit of a preamble. We heard from a victim of a sexual crime, Patricia Pendrey, who said that her investigating officer was amazing, kept her up to date and had a really trauma informed response. However, she went on maternity leave and the victim then had a different investigating officer. Patricia's experience with that second investigating officer was very different. She said that, unfortunately, she was not kept up to date and she contrasted her experience there. When you are looking at the QPS manual and your handbook in relation to the responsibility of investigating officers to keep victims of crime up to date and informed about stages of the prosecution or stages of the investigation, what checks and balances are there? How is it monitored? Should it vary between police officers in the way that Patricia described her experience to us?

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: Unfortunately, it will. I can give experiences from a couple of situations that might help in part answer the question. When reflecting on my own investigative experience as a North Brisbane district detective and the number of complaints that investigators receive both in criminal investigation work and child protection investigation work, we each carry a workload. That workload could vary at any time between 20 investigative files and as high as 50, depending on where

you are working. I hate to use the word 'prioritise', but every day you have to look at the files and try to work out how you will manage your workload each day. You might have every intention to come in on a day and make contact with a particular victim, to provide them with an update with regard to their matter, but the minute you walk into the station there could be a more significant matter that occurs and you get dragged away, and you could end up in a homicide investigation where you might work for one week, one month or one year. There are factors that can affect the ability to make contact with victims. I am not saying that that is an excuse at all. We need to be better, and this hearing and inquiry are about trying to identify ways we can be better.

I am going to reverse the situation you spoke about. I can talk a little bit about homicide investigations because my substantive position is the detective superintendent in charge of homicide. Without identifying particular matters, there was a recent investigation. In homicide we try to appoint a single point of contact as a family liaison officer. Generally their sole role in the investigation is to keep families up to date with the progress of the investigation, particularly around media releases—we like to advise family in advance if there is going to be a media release so they are well aware of that and they can prepare for that—and then of course through any court process. In this particular matter the family of the victim were unhappy with the response from the family liaison officer. I became aware of that situation because Brett Thompson from Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group, with whom I work very well, made me aware of that situation. Brett and I travelled to south of the Gold Coast hinterland after-hours to meet with the family and hear their concerns and their concerns were validated. It was not good enough. As a result, the following day we appointed a new family liaison officer with certain expectations. As a result, that family later nominated that person for an award at the Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group annual night of awards. When we do get it wrong we look to make improvements, and that is another example where we have done that.

I will touch on the sexual violence side of things, with our sexual violence liaison officers. The officer in charge of the CIB and the CPIU is responsible for ensuring that victims of sexual violence are kept up to date, where practical and possible, with regard to the investigations. Of course, when we do receive advice from victims that they are unhappy with the support they are receiving we look to rectify those problems and change them. We are always looking to be better and to make more contact with our victims. There will be situations where victims are more than happy with the service provided and, unfortunately, we know there will be situations where they are not. Where they are not, we need to be better and work out how we can be better. Does that help answer your question?

Mrs GERBER: Yes, it does. Thank you. I will ask a quick follow-up question and then I will put my question to Queensland Corrective Services. We heard from a criminologist in our Brisbane hearing yesterday. Were you able to tune in to the Brisbane hearing yesterday? No. The criminologist put to us that the core duties of police are to keep our communities safe and to properly investigate those matters so that there is a successful prosecution at the end and that perhaps the expectation of police in relation to victim liaison is something that needs to be looked at. Part of this inquiry is looking at a one-stop shop or a system where victims of crime can be supported in a way that is not the sole responsibility of the investigating officer of the case. I am interested in your views on that.

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: In any situation, if we can provide a better service to assist victims, whether it be through the police or any other agency, that has to be a positive and it is something we should definitely look at. Having said that, I know from my own personal experiences and talking to many police that there is a sense of ownership when you have an investigation, and building a relationship with the victim and the victim's family is important. At the end of the day, the outcome of the judicial process can be rewarding as well for a police officer, and maintaining that relationship with victims is important in that regard. However, if there are opportunities to provide a better service to victims of crime, I certainly would understand the service being available and wanting to work with that.

Mrs GERBER: I now turn to Corrective Services. In your opening statement you talked about eligible people for the victims register and that when they are on the victims register QCS provides timely information to them about the perpetrator or the person incarcerated, in accordance with the criteria that you outlined in your opening statement. I am sorry: I will refer again to another hearing that you perhaps have not yet been able to look at the transcript of. In Rockhampton we heard from Glenn and Linda Watson whose daughter was murdered, and the murderer is still incarcerated. They said they are on the victims register but they expressed some concerns around not being told when he will be released and not being able to get—I understand it may not quite sit within your purview but any comments you might be able to provide would be helpful—an order that means he cannot come into contact with them or I think the grandchildren—do not quote me on that though—when he is released.

CHAIR: Grandchild.

Mrs GERBER: It was the grandchild, yes. In relation to the timely communication with eligible persons on the victims register, what is 'timely' in terms of Corrective Services? What are your KPIs?

Assistant Commissioner Hyde: I certainly will utilise the assistance of my colleague to flesh out a few details. Wherever possible, we will aim to address the volume of applications we receive. We do have a slight backlog and we do everything we can to prioritise and triage based on risk thresholds and things like parole eligibility dates. To date, from current calculations, we have a backlog of 49. Given the volume of applications and the small unit of such staff, we do our best in terms of streamlining and prioritising the risk.

As for the certain individual matter, unfortunately we cannot provide a response to that but it is certainly something we will take away. In terms of talking a little bit further about how we prioritise and the timely provision of information to our eligible persons, I might ask for assistance from my colleague Michelle.

Ms Moore: In relation to the information that we track and monitor daily for the notification to our persons on the register, it is very clear that we are tracking in terms of their release or their discharge date or if they have been granted parole. In that regard, the person should be very well aware in terms of when the perpetrator is to be released.

Mrs GERBER: Is it within a couple of days? Are there actual time line KPIs?

Ms Moore: We have KPIs and they talk about 'as soon as practical'. The reason it is as soon as practical is that it depends on the type of release. If we know what the release date is that is coming up—for instance, if it is a court or parole date and we know that date, they will be given that date at front end; that is when they are engaged and they are registered with the parties. If the person is applying for board ordered parole, they will be notified that necessarily the person has applied for parole. Once the Parole Board has made that decision, as soon as that notification is made, if it is a grant of parole, they will be notified within that next working day. If, for instance, that date of release was that same day, we would notify that same day.

The KPIs are very important. The importance for us is that we get the right information—the accurate information in a timely fashion to our registered persons. When we put a KPI around it, we have to be fairly general, because the type of sentencing or type of release will dictate what that time frame needs to be.

Mrs GERBER: Maybe it is QPS who needs to address the second part of my question around victims of crime feeling safe once the perpetrator is released. We heard from victims of crime in relation to particularly heinous crimes such as murder or some particularly heinous sexual assault crimes where the children have not been able to get any protection orders to ensure that when the perpetrator is released they cannot come into contact with the family or the victims.

Assistant Commissioner Hyde: I will refer to my colleague besides me. If the question relates to providing a voice to our eligible persons to liaise with the Parole Board Queensland, that is a real key component of the role of our victims register staff. In fact, we really empower our eligible persons to write submissions to the Parole Board and we provide as much level of assistance to our eligible persons as we possibly can.

As indicated in my opening remarks, one of the main ways that an eligible person can have their voice heard and can be reassured as to their safety when a parolee is released at the hands of Parole Board Queensland is to tailor some conditions such as contact conditions. In this case it may well be that they do not feel safe and they respectfully request that PBQ consider a condition on their order, perhaps that the parolee not be released to a particular location or not have contact with either themselves or their grandchildren et cetera. The voice of our eligible persons in the parole process is quite significant, and that is where our staff can assist in tailoring those conditions. I am not sure if my colleague can offer anything further from QPS.

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: You have touched on the Parole Board side of things. In the more serious significant offences, we find victims tend to know when their perpetrators are to be released, and at times we see them ringing investigating officers if the investigating officer still works with the Queensland Police Service. Likewise, some of those officers are well aware and they do make contact where they can with victims to let them know that it is happening. I think the Parole Board conditions that are placed on them is one of those mechanisms to ensure their safety.

Insp. Park: The reality is that simply being the family member of a victim of crime would not automatically make a person eligible for any type of court ordered protection order, which is why the probation conditions are the most important and the most appropriate conditions that can be offered to a victim for ongoing protection.

Ms BOLTON: Acting Chief Superintendent Morrow, you have spoken about the sexual violence liaison officer and the family liaison officer who, from my understanding, is appointed in the event of a suspicious death. For other victims of crimes, including those that do not result in death, what do you see is the missing link that can act in a similar way to those liaison officers? That was a common need identified through the various hearings.

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: In all instances of investigations, the person who is appointed the investigating officer—and we can talk about a break and enter, for example—becomes the liaison officer for that matter. In recent times to improve that process Queensland Police Service trialled email to SMS as a means of being able to more quickly communicate with victims and witnesses in relation to matters. The difficulty at times is if an investigating officer is working a day shift and their victim or witness is working during the day, and therefore they are required to make contact after-hours, which sometimes is impracticable. The use of the email to SMS is a means of trying to keep those witnesses and victims up to date.

In February 2023 the Queensland Police Service launched the *Close the Loop, 5MILE*—a five-minute intensive learning experience—video as part of an awareness campaign to educate police regarding policy and legislation concerning updating an informant or a victim of crime on the status of an investigation until its conclusion. As a process of moving forward, the Queensland Police Service is looking at ways to do that better and this is one of those.

Ms BOLTON: In relation to the investigating officer acting as that liaison, we did hear examples where with break and enters there were things that the victims were not aware of such as the types of support services or compensation. There was one suggestion and an example given where a sheet was provided by police about the types of things to do and where to apply. Is that the role—it is quite a large role when you think of the volume of work police are already doing—to ensure they have all of that information so they can get counselling and so forth?

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: It is the role that is in place for them to do that and the use of the police referral system by QPRIME. If you can bear with me, not all matters are provided with a police referral but there are a number of criteria where we do suitability assessments in that regard. It is a lot of work, yes, but it is our role to do that at this time.

Ms BOLTON: We heard a lot of really good reports about the incredible work of the Homicide Victims' Support Group. It almost seemed like there needs to be a similar group for those who are not victims of homicide. We did hear that apparently in the past there was. Do you have any knowledge of that or as to why it is no longer in existence?

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: I am not sure of the group you refer to. Do you have a name of the group and I can take it on notice and come back?

Ms BOLTON: I am trying to remember off the top of my head. I think it was the Queensland victims' support association, which apparently existed quite some years ago and is no longer in existence. As I said, the work of the HVSG has come up often, and the type of role that it takes on seems to be something that could assist other victims besides those of homicide.

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: I think you make an excellent suggestion. I work closely with the Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group and they do remarkable work in providing support to victims, from the start right through to the finish, so any suggestion of potential other groups that could help other categories of victims is a great recommendation.

Ms BUSH: There are a couple of different agencies that do really responsive work. The gap is for victims of assault and that type of crime, where there does not seem to be that service response. One of the themes that has come up is that there are some victims who are repeat victims, and you touched on that. There are also a lot of victims for whom it is their very first experience of victimisation and maybe the only episode they ever have and they are stepping into this really foreign landscape and they have no idea what is ahead of them and the role they can play. Some people have suggested that they would have liked a booklet or a map or something tactile that would plot out for them what the process is, who is involved, who the players are, who the main contacts are and how a victim can have a voice. I am after your views on whether you in the QPS think that would be a beneficial resource to provide to victims at an early stage.

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: We have a victim response framework which has been developed under the Queensland Police Service Prevention Together Strategic Framework 2021-2024 as a model to provide consistent and evidence-based responses to support victims of crime and prevent revictimisation. A significant component of the victim response framework is victim triaging, which enables tailored service delivery responses for victims of crime. Victims of crime are initially identified

through QPRIME and an assessment is then conducted to determine the vulnerability and risk of future victimisation. The risk classification determines a predefined policy and response to meet the needs of the victim. The framework also provides standardised and consistent information to victims of crime in relation to crime prevention advice, support and referral options. These are designed to complement Queensland Police Service crime prevention materials and referral options. The framework is being implemented and, in collaboration with districts, it is currently operating in Gympie Patrol Group, has implementation in the South Brisbane district and is poised for implementation in the Ipswich police district. At the time of complaint and investigation, police provide further targeted support to victims of crime through police referrals. Does that answer your question?

Ms BUSH: It kind of does. That is very conceptual for me. What I am hearing you say is that there is a broader framework that considers triaging and referrals out, which still then puts it on the services to have to map out the process. I guess what I am talking about is a dedicated resource, whether that is online or something in hard copy, that victims can refer to at 11 o'clock at night when there is no service operating but they have to remind themselves again what is next, what a mention is and what their role is in that. Is there anything like that available that you are aware of and would that be beneficial?

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: Ian?

Insp. Park: It may assist that police provide a range of information to victims, including referral and support service information, as well as offence-specific type information. The QPS, in partnership with the University of Queensland, has developed a victim information and support document for victims of break and enter, sexual assault, unlawful entry and unlawful use of motor vehicle crimes. These are provided to victims upon reporting a crime to Policelink and include information on support options which might happen during an investigation, scenes-of-crime information and crime prevention information. My understanding is that Policelink largely emails that information to people who call in to the call centre and provide that. In addition to that, our district crime prevention coordinators play a significant role in distributing written information that assists victims to understand the process and what they might be able to access as a result.

Ms BUSH: Great. Chair, I wonder if it would help for us to receive a copy of that leaflet that was just referred to for the break and enters and the car crimes.

CHAIR: You can take it on notice. I want to hand over to Jason, but before I do I want to ask one question. One of the gaps that we heard in evidence was when people are released on bail, especially in the domestic violence area. We did have a witness talk about the fact that the first time they realised someone had been released on bail was when they were knocking on the door of the aggrieved. I know it is a difficult area because a person gets bail. How is that information then fed back to a person who they can then contact? I can see the difficulty in coordinating all of that. There are too many moving parts, but it was one area that came up. Does anyone have a view on how that could be better managed or is it managed well? I might be overstating the problem, but I am just really relying on what we heard.

Insp. Park: At the moment it is largely ad hoc and does rely on the common sense of probably prosecutors as well as watch house staff. I know there have been numerous incidents where our prosecutors have contacted an aggrieved directly to say, 'Hey, just letting you know that this person did get bail.' I am aware that occurs from a watch house as well. Is that formalised through any particular process? I would say the answer is no, and there probably is scope for that to occur in a more formalised way. It probably would require a fair bit of depth of thought to work out how that would be best done but, like I say, I think largely at the moment it does rely on the common sense of the people involved.

CHAIR: Something that occurred to me—and it may not be appropriate—is when the court has to prepare the bail. Could there be a system whereby the court notifies the aggrieved? It used to be a JP but probably not anymore, but the court officer then has to go and get the accused to sign their bail, so it is almost immediate. I do not know. Is that too onerous a job for the courts? Would that help in assisting to get people to know?

Insp. Park: It is probably not our place to nominate members of other departments to take on work like that.

CHAIR: Yes, fair enough.

Insp. Park: That certainly may be a point at which those instances could be identified and that could be a point of discussion between ourselves and our colleagues in DJAG to determine whether that is a workable way of doing it.

Supt Dwyer: Just as a point of reference, the policy of the QPS certainly does take into account that, when a respondent is in custody on the making of an application for a protection order, officers must consider notifying the victim before that person is released from detention, but that is in a civil sense on the making of an application. It is probably not too much of a stretch to expand that approach from the civil process to the criminal process.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr HUNT: I have a question—surprise, surprise—for Sarah. I should know the answer to it, Sarah, but the truth is that I cannot remember. It is an operational one. With regard to all of the roles and functions that you just described in your very comprehensive opening statement, do they sit astride the custodial operations sphere command and probation and parole as well? Do they straddle both? If they do, does that sometimes lead to any operational blockages coordinating the two?

Assistant Commissioner Hyde: It is a great question. Most of the business units within specialist operations provide a centralised service delivery across both custodial and community corrections, and certainly the victims register does a wonderful job in coordinating those eligible persons who have perpetrators both within our custodial centres and within community corrections, so they do straddle across both and they do a wonderful job.

Mr HUNT: Does that at times present some challenges?

Assistant Commissioner Hyde: Not that I am aware of, but I might refer to Michelle. I have not heard of any issues or any rub or any fractures given that we sit across both, but I may be wrong. I will refer to Michelle for that one.

Ms Moore: I agree with Sarah on that one, thank you.

Mr KRAUSE: My question is to the QPS, and thank you both for your evidence here today. Throughout the course of the last couple of weeks we have heard from a lot of witnesses. One thing that has stuck with me is a submission from Cairns, I think it was, where a victim of crime said very clearly that what they wanted to see from the process was justice in their view. Just this week in Ipswich one of our witnesses who works in the victims of crime space and who has had a lot to do with various things, as well as being a victim of crime himself, made comments about police responses, especially initial responses, when someone goes to report a crime not always being up to scratch. Some of the factors he mentioned in that were fatigue and one of the others was a sense of hopelessness about the justice process and that it is not actually being done. I wanted to ask the police representatives about their views on how much that can impact that sense of justice not being done through the system against offenders. How much can that impact or does impact on the response of QPS officers to victims of crime?

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: I will be honest: I am not quite sure what the question is asking me. I note that you said that the initial response from police when a victim might come to report a crime—and they have identified, in this instance, issues around fatigue and hopelessness of the judicial system—was impacted. Is that sort of what—

Mr KRAUSE: Yes, that is right. Not every officer, but obviously for each particular officer and each particular crime sometimes the responses are really good and other times they are not up to scratch. I am asking for your impression about how, from where you sit in the QPS, the impacts of the broader justice system and what happens in it can play into police reactions—police responses—when they are confronted with victims of crime reporting crime.

Det. Chief Supt Morrow: I do not know whether I can make comment about how others feel about their experiences with the judicial system. I do not think it would be fair for me to make comment on other people's feelings and emotions around that, sorry.

Supt Dwyer: The QPS is undertaking a body of work in conjunction with our colleagues at Griffith University to understand desensitisation to domestic and family violence and how that may impact upon police responses and police attitudes and beliefs and, on a much larger and broader scale, our organisational culture. A body of work is being undertaken. We hope to understand the response to the volume of DFV calls for service that we address day in and day out and how that might impact upon our members and their mental and physical and spiritual health. We look forward to the outcomes from our engagement with our academic partners and hope it provides some very great meaning and impact to the way in which we do business into the future.

CHAIR: I have a question which may be outside the scope of our inquiry. I was interested to know how the videorecording of complainants is going. It is still a pilot, isn't it?

Supt Dwyer: It is, Chair, yes. It is a 12-month pilot being undertaken in those two locations that the chief superintendent referred to in our opening address. From my perspective, being the superintendent in charge of that project, it is going incredibly well with our partners from DJAG. We have seen some amazing benefits in terms of reducing the traumatisation to victims of domestic and family violence.

Like other states in the country who have this capability, we are yet to see a matter go to trial and how the judiciary responds to the legislative process and cross-examination. We are ever hopeful that it will be a successful pilot. It is yet to be externally evaluated but for all intents and purposes, to answer your question, it is going incredibly well.

CHAIR: Without putting words into your mouth, that would also assist victims to not have to be retraumatised by having to give further evidence in court. But, if it went to trial, they would be subject to cross-examination?

Supt Dwyer: That is the primary aim of it—to reduce that retraumatisation, stopping a victim having to retell their story on numerous occasions to different people.

Ms BUSH: There has been discussion around the Charter of Victims' Rights and the degree of enforceability around that and that complaints are raised often with the Victim Services Coordinator, who then refers them back to the relevant department. Victims do not really feel like they are addressed or anything comes of that. It has also been suggested that the charter is relocated into the Human Rights Act and strengthened. Have police turned their mind to doing some work around, if that were to happen, what that would look like? Have police done some preparedness work around what would be the impacts on police around mapping out the duties and obligations that you have under the charter and bolstering the response around that in anticipation?

Supt Dwyer: It is probably a matter we could take on notice. We would have to engage with our strategic policy branch. That is where this matter would rightfully sit. We can take that on notice, if you like, and provide a response accordingly.

Mrs GERBER: I have a simple question and the answer may be the same as at the start of this inquiry. With the pilot program, none of those cases have progressed through to an outcome yet, have they? When you say that it has been extremely successful, have you seen the progression of some of those video evidence cases through to conclusion and prosecution?

Supt Dwyer: I can take it on notice and come back to you with the statistics in terms of how many cases have proceeded. When we talk about finalisation of the matters, of those matters where a videorecorded statement has been obtained, they have resolved into a plea of guilty. What I meant previously was that there has not been a trial where the videorecorded evidence has been played as the adult victim's evidence-in-chief.

CHAIR: One of the motivations for the videorecording of evidence was that there was evidence from other jurisdictions that indicated the number of matters that went to trial significantly decreased. I am sorry to be putting words into your mouth. You can disagree at any point. That has an ongoing effect: the police officers do not have to prepare for a case, which involves time, and it also alleviates court time.

Supt Dwyer: The efficiencies are significant not only for QPS but also for DJAG and, most importantly, the timely disposition of justice and the outcome for a victim-survivor. To me, that is the most crucial part in all of this. The by-products are incredibly felt across both DJAG and ourselves.

CHAIR: There are a couple of questions on notice. Could the leaflet referred to by Inspector Park be forwarded to the secretariat at some point? The other question on notice was: what work has QPS undertaken in mapping their duties re obligations under the Charter of Victims' Rights? Is it possible to get that information to the secretariat by 11 May?

Insp. Park: I would imagine so, yes.

CHAIR: If there are any issues with time lines, just communicate directly with the secretariat. That concludes the briefing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today. Thank you to our hardworking Hansard reporters. Thank you to the secretariat and all the support staff who deal with the committee's every whim. A transcript of these proceedings will be able on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare the public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 1.07 pm.