

INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT PROVIDED TO VICTIMS OF CRIME

Submission No: 12
Submitted by: Susan and John Sandeman
Publication: Making the submission and your name public
Attachments: See attachment
Submitter Comments:

SUBMISSION

Susan and John Sandeman
TOWNSVILLE North Queensland

INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT PROVIDED TO VICTIMS OF CRIME

ABOUT THE INQUIRY

On 16 March 2023 the Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion that the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee inquire and report on support provided to victims of crime in Queensland.

Our Perspective.

We, John and Susan Sandeman are the grandparents of our 17 month old grandson, MASON JOHN PARKER, who was murdered in 2011, in Townsville ,Queensland, Australia.

Under the current Victim's of Crime Act we have no legal standing to be financially supported or to be allowed to be kept informed and included appropriately and in a timely manner throughout the investigation and prosecution without the direct permission from our grandson's mother and father.

The terms of reference are:

1. Better coordination of state-wide services to ensure there is trauma informed, victim centric and timely support for victims, from the time of the incident and throughout the subsequent investigation and any prosecution, including:

- how the criminal justice system, including the Queensland Police Service, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, and court services currently support victims; and how restorative justice conferences and processes may be improved upon

Currently at the Townsville Courts, there are no victim support personnel on the ground. Only the bare minimum court services such as giving individuals direction as where to go for court proceedings and fine payments.

10 years ago, there were volunteers that sat with victims during the time they spent at court. Now we see victims seeking support outside services such as the QUEENSLAND HOMICIDE VICTIMS SUPPORT GROUP. These are people who volunteer their services and have had personal experience with the court system and procedures. If victims don't come under this category, we do not know what support is available.

The removal of previous onsite court support for victims was directly due to the Queensland Government withdrawing funding and the office space was no longer available.

We highly respect the Queensland Police Service. They have been the one force in the system that worked tirelessly for us and with us. Their ongoing welfare checks and occasional phone calls keeps us informed with issues that are pertinent to us.

SUBMISSION

Susan and John Sandeman

TOWNSVILLE North Queensland

We found that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions were very difficult to have direct contact with. It was like closed doors except during court dates when we met in person. But even then it was an intense time and limited one on one discussions were brief.

We need professionals from the Mental Health Sector included in the process to guide and evaluate situations in a timely manner. Furthermore, face to face interactions during court proceedings with victims help develop better relationships and trust.

. how to ensure victims are kept informed and included in an appropriate and timely way throughout the investigation, prosecution and parole period.

Fortunately for us, we developed a good relationship with the investigating officers in Townsville. Even though we wanted desperately to know small details of ongoing investigation and prosecution we were not entitled to.

Currently we are in the process of writing an appeal for parole which will be in 2028, but as we get older the need to write one is important. We need assistance in this area and there are only a handful of informed and knowledgeable individuals that will and are able to assist us with information that can help murderers for example do their full term.

We believe victims have a right to full disclosure on how to effectively write a non-parole submission. Just as the perpetrator has the right to professional lawyers who specialise in these areas and utilise the jargon of the law and areas to focus on for their clients' best outcome.

2. The operation and effectiveness of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009* (the Act) for victims of violence, including:

- expanding the eligible victim's category to include home invasion; and enhancements to provide better, trauma informed and timely assistance and support to victims

The term victims needs to be broadened. In our case, our grandson was murdered and being grandparents we were not eligible for any timely assistance or support. The Law does not include us as victims. Close family members, and sometimes close friends need support as well. They too help victims and need to know how and what is the best way to assist these 'broken people' . In many cases family drift apart for the lack of knowledge or know how to support on another.

We continue to feel the long term effects of the murder. Our family dynamics has changed for the worse. Grandchildren don't know us and we have never met them.

Furthermore, as victims we exposed a flaw in the law that could have prevented our grandsons death. A Law that could only be explained as COMMON SENSE. But instead of simply making an amendment, the

SUBMISSION

Susan and John Sandeman

TOWNSVILLE North Queensland

government resisted our plea to protect children. It cost the tax payers thousands of dollars, furthermore, extending the timeframe and putting children in a vulnerable position.

We, as victims, had no support or assistance on how to make things right. Political jargon, ministers making reference to clauses in Acts, that really could be interpreted in different ways but also did not answer our inquiry. We fought to change the Queensland Law to ensure safety measures were put in place expanding Mandatory Reporting to include All Queensland Child Care Services.

We put in our own time to do extensive research, investigate to get clarification, invested our own finances to petition, pay for our own accommodation to travel to court some 300km away and accommodation for 3 days. Furthermore, we paid our way to fly from Townsville to Brisbane and accommodation to be in Parliament when our bill was passed introducing a momentous moment in our life to keep Mason Parkers memory alive and to keep children safe by ensuring they have a voice.

In our case, as victims, the Queensland government cost us money to make things right.

However, our greatest disappointment and evidence that victims of crime are not acknowledged that we have answers and solutions to problems. But instead we are simply people who want to complain and be a nuisance to our leaders of this state of Queensland. In our personal moment of triumph, sitting in the Parliament gallery in Brisbane, close to 12.00 midnight, listening to the debate and the vote to pass Mason's Law, which we fought for 5 long years, was without the presence, support and acknowledgement of the premier of the time, Ms Anastacia Palaszczuk.

That alone gives us no confidence that victims of crime are given the respect they deserve.

- mapping victims' experiences through the financial assistance application process to identify the ways to reduce the burden on applicants

As grandparents of the victim we required financial assistance especially as we had a re-trial much further away from our hometown. This added additional stress to our finances. We received no financial assistance.

Furthermore, additional financial compensation needs to be introduced to replace stolen and damaged vehicles, for example. This would greatly assist families to return to some normality. This is a very timely issue in our town of Townsville when the existing government initiatives are not helping reduce crime. Someone needs to be accountable. Victims do not need this added burden to replace damaged property, especially when ones vehicle is essential for work, taking children to school, going to appointments, shopping, visiting and helping family just to name a few.

A personal friend of ours had her vehicles stolen twice. Her insurance only paid a minimum and she had to take out a loan to purchase a secondhand vehicle. This too was stolen and again had to take out a

SUBMISSION

Susan and John Sandeman

TOWNSVILLE North Queensland

personal loan as well as still owing for the first loan. Both of these incidences occurred just before Christmas in 2022. She received no support whatsoever and is a retiree.

- reviewing the Charter of Victims' Rights to identify common complaint themes from victims to inform future sector training needs

North Queensland desperately needs a centralised office for North Queensland Victims of Crime Support Group. We need to have face to face support, not just a voice over the phone or an email. This is a situation that requires a real human interaction.

Many North Queenslanders feels that we are the forgotten ones always missing out on yearly gatherings and acknowledgment of individuals who greatly give their time, mostly volunteering as we do. It cost us time and money to join in yearly events that support victims in Brisbane to be able to take part and share stories, achievements and meet with other victims who have a better understanding of life after a tragedy.

And it must be remembered, life changes for victims and we need each other, more than ever.

- revising the existing government initiatives in relation to the Act's operation and effectiveness.

It is important that the government revises issues as circumstances change. Crime is on the increase. There's a growing number of victims and we require more services and compensation to help victims through unfamiliar proceedings such as the court system. Knowledge is power and victims need direction, information through support.

3. The benefits, disadvantages and resourcing impacts of any recommendations

Financial expenditure is always the number one priority for the government. If the government is serious to make changes, the benefits and impact to individuals and their family will ensure timely, highly professional intervention and support to get through one of the most toughest experiences one can go through.

Financial compensation to replace a stolen damaged vehicle for example, would greatly assist families to return to some normality. This is a very timely issue in our town of Townsville, when the existing government initiatives are not helping reduce crime. And no real solution for the near future

The disadvantage of adding more resources into supporting victims, means we are not addressing and investing into the heart of the issue; reducing crime in our community.

SUBMISSION

**Susan and John Sandeman
TOWNSVILLE North Queensland**



We thank the committee for their time and hope our submission has provided invaluable insight.

**John and Susan Sandeman
Child Safety Advocates - MASON'S LAW
4th of April 2023**