



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH**

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Hansard 10 March 1999

### **CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND PENALTIES AND SENTENCES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs PRATT** (Barambah—IND) (10.11 p.m.) I do not stand to talk to the House about events in the lives of victims of serious crime. I stand here as a victim. My views come straight from the heart and, although I will not repeat what happened to me, I support this legislation because of what I went through.

The cost of crime in the community is incalculable, but every man, woman and child suffers and feels the effects of crime. How many of us walk the streets at night and feel safe? How many of us can walk away from our unlocked vehicles and know that all its contents will be there when we get back? How many of us go to bed at night secure in the knowledge that the mower left outside or the door left unlocked will be of no concern to us? In this day and age who, on remembering, would not immediately get up and lock up the mower and secure the door on entering the house again?

Each time we reach into our pockets to purchase any items from a grocery shelf, we pay over and over again for the items that have been stolen from those very same shelves. Each time we buy an item of clothing, we pay an extra component to cover the cost of the item that had previously hung on a hanger but has since disappeared out the door on someone's back. Each time we pay an account, we pay for the vandalism that the owner of the business has had to repair. The cost of living in the nineties is far higher than it ever need be.

Recently a convicted female criminal was being interviewed during a program about drugs. She stated that she did not consider jail a deterrent but an inconvenience, and would continue her criminal activities once released from jail. This legislation may not curb the activities of hardened criminals, but for the first time it may make them think twice. If there is a possibility that only one victim is spared because of this legislation, then the legislation is worth it. If one person thinks twice before committing their very first crime of taking an item off a shelf, and if it stops them going further down the track of crime, then it is worth it.

We talk about truth in sentencing. What is "truth"? A dictionary in the Parliamentary Library states that "truth" is—

"Agreement with a standard or rule ... reality ... the actual state of the case ... the matter or circumstance as it really is."

I ask members of the House to ask victims of violent crime and victims of abuse—ask those who have worn the bruises and suffered the pain, whether it be physical, emotional or psychological—whether they believe that the perpetrators of the trauma inflicted upon them have indeed served the sentence that was handed down—sentences that actually state the case as it really is. Members should ask them whether a sentence of 5, 10 or 15 years that has been handed down in the courts really is what the perpetrator served. In opposing this Bill, the Labor Party has aligned itself with the criminals.

I support the victims. It does not take long for a child to know what is right and what is wrong. My grandson is eight months old and already he knows and understands the meaning of the word "no". It took one sharp slap on the hand to make him realise that there was no reward in continuing what he did. When a child steals from a local store, he does not just bowl in, help himself and walk out as if nothing had happened. He sneaks in furtively, checks that no-one is looking, grabs a handful and runs. He knows that what he is doing is wrong and if the punishment does not reflect the crime, he

does not hesitate to repeat that crime. As adults it is our responsibility to teach our children right from wrong. It is our responsibility to make the deterrent strong enough to make committing the offence and being apprehended and convicted very unpalatable.

As the Leader of the Opposition stated, the fact is that a lot of Queenslanders do not have much faith in the criminal justice system, because the people who commit the crimes are back on the streets in a very short space of time and, more often than not, are reoffending. I have often stated, and I think it is worth repeating, that our courts continually make excuses for those who are brought before them. How often do we hear, "The poor things, they were abused as children" or, "They are the product of a divorced couple" or, "They were led astray by somebody else." Lots of people have been abused, lots of people have been led astray and lots of children have divorced parents. We do not all go out and commit heinous crimes. We get on with our lives and we respect the right of others to get on with theirs.

The people of Queensland, especially the victims of crime, are sick to death of courts handing down lenient sentences, they are sick to death of variations in sentencing and they are sick to death of criminals having the rights that they denied their victims. I ask that the Government start working for the law-abiding citizens of Queensland, start protecting their rights as the victims of crime and start putting the welfare of the community before that of the criminal. The criminal deserves to experience what he caused his victims to endure, that is, vulnerability, violation, humiliation and shame. I commend this Bill to the House.

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