



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 6 December 2001

PENALTIES AND SENTENCES [NON-CONTACT ORDERS] AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (12.23 p.m.), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to the discussion on the Penalties and Sentences (Non-Contact Orders) Amendment Bill. This bill deals with the relatively short point of non-contact orders. All members have acknowledged that it is a useful additional option to be made available to the courts to protect victims.

As members have noted, the key point about this initiative is that it highlights how the parliament is increasingly recognising the needs of victims in the criminal justice process. It is true that we have time-honoured and established principles that deal with offenders, their rights in respect of a fair trial and so forth. Traditionally, the criminal justice system has not provided victims with the attention and respect they deserve. Increasingly, the government is ensuring that victims are heard.

The Victims Support Unit in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the criminal compensation payments that are now available to victims are two formal elements that have been introduced in recent years to recognise the distress and trauma that victims suffer. Victims also deserve to be protected from offenders who may do their time and then be released from prison. This bill seeks to do that. It ensures that the entitlement of a victim not to be further distressed or harassed by an offender extends well after the offence is committed, and it gives the victim every opportunity to recover emotionally from the effects of the offence committed against them.

Obviously the best way to deal with the impacts of crime on victims is to prevent crime in the first place. That is why the government's primary focus is on crime prevention. However, like so many of the ills of our society, crime is something that is unlikely to be stamped out completely. That is why appropriate measures need to be put in place to minimise and cushion as much as possible the impact of crime on individual citizens. This is part of a package of measures designed to achieve just that.

A number of members raised the ancillary ways in which the community itself can assist in preventing the impact of crimes on victims. Members have mentioned Neighbourhood Watch and a range of other measures that they have experienced in their work as members representing electorates throughout the state. I am grateful for the support of all participants in this debate for the amendments contained in this bill.

I note that the opposition proposes to move some amendments and I will address those issues in Committee. Suffice to say that these amendments I have introduced into the House apply to adult offenders and that the law relating to juveniles is, of course, the Juvenile Justice Act. I will address in more detail the specifics of how we might respond to the proposal of the opposition in Committee. I commend the bill to the House and thank members for their contributions.
