Speech by

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MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE

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DANGEROUS PRISONERS (SEXUAL OFFENDERS) AMENDMENT BILL

Ms JONES (Ashgrove—ALP) (12.45 pm): I rise in support of the Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Amendment Bill. I believe this bill strengthens community protection in relation to those persons designated as dangerous prisoners. More than 80 per cent of sexual offences in Queensland are against women. As the youngest woman in this parliament I am proud to be part of a government that is taking decisive action to protect women and young people from sexual offenders. As most members would be aware, in my electorate recently there have been a spate of sexual attacks on women exercising on our bike paths. The women of my electorate and all Queensland women have a right to be safe from sexual offenders and, in particular, potential repeat offenders.

The act has been in operation in Queensland since 2003 and enables the Supreme Court to order the post-sentence preventative detention or supervision of those released prisoners who pose a significant danger to the community. The Serious Sexual Offenders Review Committee, an interdepartmental committee comprising senior officers from the department of corrective services, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and the Queensland Police Service, began operation in August 2003, shortly after the commencement of the act. It considers all offenders who come within the definition of serious sexual offenders, serving a term of imprisonment of two or more years, who pose an unacceptable risk to the community after release. The committee refers appropriate matters to Crown Law for advice. Applications must be made to the Supreme Court at least five months before the earliest possible release date of the prisoner.

It is appropriate to introduce certain amendments at this time to strengthen the protection provided to the community by the provisions. In March last year the act was amended to enable the Supreme Court to impose interim detention orders pending a final determination by the court of an application relating to the released prisoner's breach of a supervision order imposed under the act.

The bill currently before the House will allow a magistrate to issue a warrant for the arrest of a person who is subject to a supervision order imposed by the Supreme Court and who is likely to contravene, is contravening or has contravened a condition of the supervision order. Under the provisions of the bill the Supreme Court must detain a released prisoner in custody pending determination of the matter relating to the alleged breach unless exceptional circumstances exist. The court must then look at whether the protection of the community can be guaranteed by a supervision order, in its original form or as amended, or whether such protection can only be guaranteed by a continuing detention order.

Currently, the act provides that when the Supreme Court is satisfied that a released prisoner has breached a supervision order the Attorney-General still carries the onus of proving that the offender is a serious danger and should be detained. The Attorney-General is asked to satisfy this test despite having satisfied the same test at the original application and despite the released prisoner having contravened the supervision order.

I believe that the amendments before the House will impose a significant deterrent on released prisoners who may be considering breaching a condition of a contravention order. The bill provides for a summary offence relating to breach of a supervision order which is punishable by up to two years imprisonment. Expectations by the community that government play a greater role in protecting Queenslanders from repeat offenders, particularly in relation to sexual offences, have increased in recent years, and this bill does just that. I commend the bill to the House.