



Speech by  
**Grace Grace**

**MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL**

Hansard Wednesday, 2 September 2009

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## **VICTIMS OF CRIME ASSISTANCE BILL**

**Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (9.12 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Victims of Crime Assistance Bill 2009 and add my support to this important bill which will bring about significant reforms for Queenslanders who are victims of crime. Under the new scheme, victims will no longer be required to apply for compensation through the court system. As the current provisions of the criminal injury compensation to victims of crime in Queensland has not been reviewed since the introduction of the Criminal Offence Victims Act 1995—13 years ago—it is appropriate now that we review this scheme which is outdated and which has been criticised for its complexity, for the cost to victims and for the delay for victims in receiving their compensation. There has been a widespread call for reform from victims support groups and justice stakeholders. So it is good news and I am very happy to be standing here tonight talking about a new scheme which is all about assisting victims of crime.

I also very much welcome a scheme which is a new scheme to be based on a financial assistance model rather than a compensation model, and I think that that model works best for people who are victims of crime. As we all know, no-one goes out seeking to be a victim of crime. But, unfortunately, when crime is committed, victims suffer very greatly after an offence is perpetrated against them. They will now be able to apply for financial assistance to a new Victim Assistance Unit, the VAU, within the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. I come from a background where a lay tribunal has best met the needs of workers who find themselves in difficult circumstances. It was often very daunting for them even to go in front of a lay tribunal, let alone in the past victims of crime having to go through the court system. I very much welcome the transition from applications being made to the court to a unit within the Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

I also very much welcome the widening of the number of victims who will now be eligible to apply for assistance. They have been categorised into three main groups and we have extended the eligibility for victims of crime compensation under the new scheme. There are primary, secondary and related victims. Obviously primary victims do not lose out under this new scheme. They are still able to get the same financial assistance that they currently get but obviously there is a combination of a broader range of services that will hopefully be part of early intervention that will really help them at a time when they deserve that assistance. It is a remarkable step forward. It goes to show that it is about assisting those primary victims of crime, particularly victims of offences which are unfortunately the type of offence that no-one wants to have perpetrated against them.

With regard to secondary victims, we have opened up the system to parents, witnesses and others who often witness acts of violence. They are now eligible for compensation under this scheme. Then of course there are related victims who are family members who obviously share in a smaller pool of money than, say, primary victims of crime. This is a fantastic step in the right direction. It broadens the ability of a wide variety of victims of crime to come forward to not only claim compensation but also get assistance in a bundle of services that will be available through the Victim Assistance Unit.

The new scheme will focus on victim recovery by paying for or reimbursing the costs of all of these goods and services I have referred to that the victim requires to help them recover from the physical and

psychological effects of an act of violence. It aims to provide a tailored, needs based response and allows for early intervention in the victim's recovery rather than waiting, as currently happens, for the conviction of the offender. There are tangible and intangible benefits to the victim, government and society of early intervention under the new scheme. The VAU will provide a central point to access support services, practical support during court proceedings and a victims complaints resolution process, as well as government coordination of services, information, training and policy development for victims of crime in Queensland.

The new unit will have five key areas of responsibility. It will coordinate financial assistance and service coordination. It will link victims up with referral services, including a website. It will train government and non-government service providers on the needs of victims of crime and compliance with the principle of justice to ensure fair treatment of victims and offer practical court support services—all very much welcomed by the victims of crime and all very much a step in the right direction to ensure that victims of crime do not necessarily suffer. The VAU will provide a point of contact. Because it will be a lay departmental type of service, the intimidation that often goes with people having to confront courts and judges and those types of things will make it a lot easier for victims to come forward and claim entitlements that are rightly theirs.

Despite the challenging economic environment in which we find ourselves, I also welcome the additional funding to operate the new scheme. The new scheme will receive an increase to \$28.8 million by 2011-2012. This is an additional \$7 million per year over and above the current criminal compensation scheme. I think that is money well spent. I think it demonstrates this Labor government's commitment to people who are affected by crime. Under the bill, financial assistance is additional to other services provided by or for government to victims of acts of violence. For example, public health services or government funded community services will continue to be made available to victims of crime.

I have had a number of constituents who have been victims of crime come to see me seeking my support for this bill. I was very glad to be able to inform them that not only will I be supporting the bill but also I will be rising tonight and speaking in support of the bill and making their views known that they support a change from the current system which, as I said, is 13 years old—a little bit outdated and complex—to a more lay, departmentally based system that will give people greater access to a whole package of goods and services. I am grateful to those people who came to see me. I am grateful for the ongoing support and the input from key stakeholders and community groups in the development of the new scheme. I believe that their input, their wise words and their experience played a big role in the department formulating the outcome of this new scheme.

I know that the department is committed to building relationships with the community and continuing to work collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure that quality services to victims of crime in Queensland continue well into the future. We hope that we will meet the needs of these victims of crime. I commend the minister and the department for their work with the report that they received and in adopting the recommendations. I am very glad to commend the bill to the House.