



Speech by

Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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VICTIMS OF CRIME ASSISTANCE BILL

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (3.25 pm): I rise this afternoon to add my positive contribution to the debate on the Victims of Crime Assistance Bill 2009.

Mr Kilburn: Speak up.

Mr BLEIJIE: I thought government members would be happy with that. This act will repeal the Criminal Offence Victims Act 1995. It will change the method in which victims of crime are supported by our community. The new method of compensation is based upon an administrative assistance approach rather than the old method of court based lump sum compensation. I agree with the member for Barron River that under the new system lawyers will not have as big a role to play, but nonetheless will have some role to play.

The approach outlined in the new method of compensating victims of crime is sensible and contemporary. Assistance support will be available for acts of violence and will be accessible to not just victims but also families and witnesses. The act being introduced stems from the victims of crime review announced by the government in November 2007. I congratulate the former Attorney-General, the member for Toowoomba North, for the work that he and his department have done in not just the review but the recommendation process as well. I add that I acknowledge and thank the current Attorney-General for putting this on the table today.

The report to the Queensland government on the victims of crime review 2008 made 27 recommendations. This act has come about following on from those recommendations, and I am pleased that the government has recognised the multitude of financial assistance that is required to support victims of crime and their families in our community. What is disappointing is that the general regard or disregard for the victims of crime over the years has been quite appalling. We constantly hear from civil libertarians around the state about the strictness of penalties and the rights of the offenders. I believe that it is this attitude that has been central to the increase of crime in this state. The constant focus of media on the plight of the Schapelle Corbies of this world rather than on the victims and the families of those law-abiding citizens, who have been marginalised to some extent, is where we as a society are heading in the wrong direction.

In the repeal of the Criminal Offence Victims Act 1995 this bill will also change Chapter 65A of the Criminal Code as preserved by the previous act, providing for a new financial assistance scheme. Under the new financial assistance scheme, victims of crime will no longer need to apply for compensation through the court system. Instead, they can apply to a Victim Assistance Unit through the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. This will hopefully make the process a lot simpler and also reduce the caseload of our courts which, of course, as members would acknowledge, is currently so high.

The most important aspect with reference to this new financial assistance scheme is the fact that it is multifaceted. Under the old legislation victims of crime simply received a lump sum payment without further financial direction or social support. This was, quite frankly, a bandaid solution. The new assistance scheme will focus on victim recovery by paying for or reimbursing the costs of goods and services that a victim requires to help them recover from the physical and psychological effects of an act of violence.

These measures also allow for a proactive approach to victim recovery rather than waiting until a conviction is recorded against the offender, which quite often can take some time. The process of rehabilitating the victims should take place well before a conviction is recorded.

I congratulate the government on this legislative amendment. The process from the report stage through to the introduction of the legislation this year has been streamlined. I believe that we have now turned the corner and our focus should be to correct the behaviours of the offenders through the various means but to support the victims.

Far too many times through various media we have seen society sensationalise crime and make celebrities out of offenders. No-one is interested in their story. What does this media attention and fanfare tell our youth about society and the general respect for fellow citizens? In a world where people can YouTube and make instant celebrities out of anyone with a webcam or a mobile phone, we need to be careful that as a society we are not sending the wrong messages to our increasingly impressionable youth.

The approach by the Beattie government in particular to sentencing and being generally soft on crime was appalling. We are finally now seeing a tougher approach to sentencing and juvenile justice being enacted and more emphasis on the victims of crime rather than the offender. I was particularly pleased to see in the legislation that the state can now recover from offenders some of the compensation and, if offenders cannot or do not pay, they have the option to go through SPER to recover those funds. Again, I congratulate the former Attorney-General of Queensland for getting this review underway. I commend the bill to the House.