




Speech By
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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Sexual Violence Awareness Month

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (12.05 pm): October is Sexual Violence Awareness Month. As we reflect on this heinous crime and raise awareness of it in the community, it is clear that more needs to be done to shine a light on what is still a hidden scourge. Sexual violence is not confined to our cities and urban areas; it is a problem in our regions as well. Sadly, sexual violence is a crime that goes underreported. It can take years to come to the attention of police. In fact, in Australia it is estimated that only 15 to 30 per cent of sexual offences are reported to police. It is also estimated that only 20 per cent of sexual offences reported to police result in criminal proceedings. Of the sexual offences that are reported to police it is estimated that only: 30 per cent proceed to prosecution; 20 per cent are adjudicated in court; 12.5 per cent are convicted of any sexual offence; and 6.5 per cent are convicted of the original offence charged. Worse still is the frightening fact that more often than not sexual violence is committed by an intimate partner or a loved one. Queensland clearly needs a coordinated strategy to tackle sexual violence in the same way that the LNP launched the *Not now, not ever* task force into domestic violence. Under Labor there have been three years of silence on the issue of tackling sexual violence. The level of reported rapes and attempted rapes has jumped to 1,870 in 2016-17, which is a 26 per cent jump since 2013-14.

Across Queensland we have a range of great services which are all doing their part to tackle sexual violence. What is missing is a coordinated approach and cohesive plan to tackle sexual violence. Less than a fortnight ago at a community breakfast on the Gold Coast I was humbled to again launch Sexual Violence Awareness Month. It was encouraging to be there alongside so many support services and people, including the amazing Di Macleod, Director of the Gold Coast Centre against Sexual Violence, Di Mangan, CEO of DVConnect and a number of hardworking police officers and support workers. A week later I was pleased to represent the Leader of the Opposition at the Sexual Violence Awareness Month 2017 symposium here in the parliament, which was put together by WWILD Sexual Violence Prevention Program and the Queensland Sexual Assault Network. We heard from insightful speakers like Di Macleod, Professor Heather Douglas and representatives from the Women's Legal Service and Queensland Advocacy Incorporated. A number of important issues were raised by support services, including the issues faced by victims of sexual violence when they find the courage to report the offence. These issues commonly centre on a lack of funded support, time delays, lack of specialisation and balancing a victim's expectation of the legal process versus the reality. The court process can be particularly frightening for victims who may be terrified of seeing their attackers again inside or outside the courtroom. Cases often only come to trial years after the offence, when the victim's recollection of their actions during the attack will be revisited and questioned.

In the eyes of the support services which help victims through the process the solution is to rebalance the scales of justice towards the victim, not the perpetrator. To encourage reporting we need to see better specialised services, support, timeliness, data and research, and community education. Importantly, we need to improve cohesion and communication between police, prosecution and support agencies to improve service quality and better support victims through this process. We need to ensure that advocacy services are there when victims get the courage to come forward.

This October every community should come together and take a stand against sexual violence. We need to get the message out to anyone who has been a victim of sexual violence and who may be afraid to report it that they can speak up and they will be supported. There are specialist police and support services right across Queensland to ensure victims of sexual violence are protected and their attackers are brought to justice. This Sexual Violence Awareness Month I would like to thank all of our police and support services for the challenging but crucial work they do.

As I have said before, sexual violence and domestic violence often go hand in hand. Domestic violence does not stop at the bedroom door. What we know of domestic violence is that under this Labor government offenders are breaching protection orders at record levels. This has nothing to do with women speaking up but everything to do with the system that is failing them when they make the step out of the shadows and call for help. Across Queensland, whether it is on the Gold Coast or on the Darling Downs, everywhere I travel the story is the same, from survivors and support workers alike. Offenders are treating protection orders like a joke because they know they can, and this government has no answer. Only the LNP will deliver a better Queensland and safe and livable communities and better support Queensland families.