




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

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CHILD PROTECTION (OFFENDER REPORTING) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (4.11 pm): I too rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. They say imitation is the greatest form of flattery, and how flattered we are on this side of the chamber. We consistently see bills introduced in this chamber which so closely reflect the bills the LNP once introduced or bills which come from recommendations from reviews set in motion by the LNP. That being said, I wish to formally start by saying that the LNP does not oppose this bill as in many ways the changes in this bill come primarily from the recommendations of a review that was set up by the LNP back in 2013 and finalised in late 2014.

The key changes in the bill, which have been referred to by other speakers, will see the merging of the Child Protection (Offender Prohibition Order) Act 2008 with the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004 to create an act dealing with reportable offenders, also known as sex offenders. It will streamline, simplify and strengthen offender prohibition order processes, as recommended by the CCC review.

Civil court processes will be amended to prohibit a self-represented offender from cross-examining a witness who is a child or was a child when the alleged offence occurred. It will amend the definition of 'concerning conduct' to ensure police can more easily align conduct with the risk the offender poses.

The bill will introduce an extended information-sharing framework designed to allow government and non-government agencies to give and receive information relative to a reportable offender. Safeguards are in place to ensure the protection of identifying information by increasing the penalty where the information is used to harass or intimidate respondents, as recommended again by the CCC review. This also includes safeguards to ensure the protection of identifying information.

The bill will broaden the scope for offenders to be considered as reportable offenders and thereby reduce the time in which a reportable offender can travel interstate. Finally, it will introduce new police powers to require access to electronic devices where there is reasonable suspicion that a reportable offender has committed an offence under the offender reporting legislation.

These changes all came about from the CCC review which found that, over the five years the Child Protection (Offender Prohibition Order) Act 2008 was in force, 48 offender prohibition orders, or OPOs, were made in response to concerning conduct. The 21 offenders who received those OPOs were convicted of more than 100 sexual or other serious crimes against children in Queensland. Of those, seven breached their OPO and were charged with failing to comply with at least one condition of their order. Incredibly, the time taken to obtain an OPO varied from nine days to, unbelievably, three years. In addition, it was found that police were using the act as a precursor rather than as a response tool, as it suggested that police were opting to use other tools to respond to concerning conduct.

Whilst I welcome wholeheartedly this bill being debated in the House this afternoon, I am a little concerned at the time it has taken the Labor government to do anything about the issues it is now trying to address. Let me state the chronology. The review was completed in late 2014 and has sat dormant for around 2½ years. That is concerning in itself—but, as they say, better late than never.

The LNP has a great track record of being tough on crime and very serious about child safety. The member for Mudgeeraba did a great job in covering that in her contribution to this debate. We are known to stand up for children and for strengthening the laws against child sexual offenders. We introduced the two-strikes policy, which saw mandatory life imprisonment for repeat child sex offenders with a minimum non-parole of 20 years.

A government member interjected.

Mr MINNIKIN: I will not take the interjection from the member over there. I think he has other issues that he will need to concentrate on with his career.

We increased penalties for child exploitation material and other child sex offences, as well as inserting a new offence of ‘grooming’ into the Criminal Code. We introduced a mandatory sentence of one year imprisonment for a sex offender who tampers with or removes their GPS monetary bracelet. Furthermore, we introduced amendments to ensure the maximum penalty for procuring a child or a person with a mental impairment for prostitution was increased from 14 years to 20 years. Furthermore, we introduced amendments to allow the court to list a predator convicted of child grooming as a dangerous offender. We also enforced more stringent reporting conditions for offenders under changes to the Child Protection (Offending Reporting) Act 2004.

In my time in this place I do not think I have seen a more graphic example of the severity of this crime as a scourge in society in general than I did when I was a member of the PCCC. I have to be very careful and temper my comments in this debate because I was a former member of the PCCC and, as every member here knows, what goes on in the PCCC stays in the PCCC. However, there was an opportunity for us to visit CCC headquarters at Fortitude Valley—and this I can share with the chamber. As part of our familiarisation as new PCCC members, we were given literally a bit of an open house tour. We met representatives in relation to fraud, boiler rooms et cetera. We were then given what I consider to be the most sobering example of just how prevalent paedophilia and sexual offenders are in society.

What happened was this: on the big screen a Google image of Brisbane popped up. The officer, who was very professional, said to the assembled PCCC members as part of our fact-finding and look-see tour, ‘We will make sure that this slide is actually slowed down.’ We did not really know why. He then rolled the tape, as they say, and the first little pinprick appeared on that Google image map of greater Brisbane. Then the next pinprick appeared et cetera. Before we knew it, pretty much it looked like Brisbane had indeed a contagion of measles. It absolutely sickened me. In my five years as a member of parliament, I do not think I have had a more gut-churning incident as I did seeing that. All it was was a visual representation—a geographical information, a spatial representation—of the prevalence of this scourge in society. To all members in this chamber and to the committee members: I applaud your efforts in bringing this bipartisan bill to the chamber this afternoon. It is moments like this where occasionally we get to contribute to a debate which I know—having sons of my own, kids in the street and from going to schools—will result in children being protected at all costs from this scourge in society. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to support this bill.

Before I finish my contribution, it would be really remiss of me not to acknowledge and thank Task Force Argos and all the dedicated police officials and officers who undertake this harrowing but vital work. Is it any wonder that they have to be rotated through—and I stand to be corrected—about every six months due to the work they have to do? My level of respect for them knows no bounds. I do not know how they do it, but thank goodness someone is doing the job they are doing. Our children are undoubtedly our most precious and vulnerable members of society. We need to give our police and all the relevant authorities updated powers and tools to protect them. I am very proud to support this bill.