



Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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**CRIMINAL CODE (CHILD SEXUAL OFFENCES REFORM) AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (3.34 pm): While I still have a high opinion of the member for Lockyer, it is somewhat tarnished. We will not be lectured to by a party that cut 225 staff from the child safety unit. Never have we heard anything positive from those opposite about the fact that we put over 400 people into child safety. We have never heard anything positive about creating a new district—

Mr PURDIE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. If the member could come back to the long title of the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am sure the member for Bancroft was just about to do that.

Mr WHITING: I was indeed. I was going to commend the government on the creation of the new child safety district around Caboolture which looks after the families in my area. Those opposite would never do that.

I rise to speak in favour of the bill that is before us. Like many of us here, I have heard firsthand about the lifetime effects of childhood sexual abuse. I know victims of child sexual abuse. I have listened to their stories. A friend of mine broke down one night and told me of the years of abuse that she had suffered at the hands of a family friend. The consequences of that were years of failed relationships, irreparable relationships with her family, a history of mental illness and ongoing substance abuse. Another person I knew was a victim of the notorious Kevin Lynch who worked for years at Brisbane schools who, we have heard reported, abused a large number of children in Queensland from the 1970s through to the 1990s. That particular offender committed suicide the day after he was charged with nine offences against a student. The victim that I met, and his family, had suffered a lifetime of effects, all of which he lived with every day, and his relationship with his family was permanently ruptured by that.

This bill implements recommendations from the *Criminal justice report* by the royal commission. I want to focus on the beneficial impact of implementing recommendations 33 to 36 of that report which are the introduction of offences that are targeted at reporting to police and a new offence of failing to protect a child from abuse by moving around the abuser or covering up the actions of a known abuser. I think everyone in the House supports that—nearly everyone. I will come back to the member for Mirani in moment.

We know that the impact on victims of adults not reporting these offences to the police or covering up for offenders is breathtakingly massive. That has led to an institutionalised pattern of abuse in some parts of our society which this bill is aiming to break. The worst case in Australia shows this pattern. In Victoria Gerald Ridsdale was convicted of sexually abusing 65 children. He held 16 appointments over 29 years as a priest. His appointments were typically short and when allegations against him were made he was often transferred to a new role or location. The royal commission reported on the local bishop. His concern was overwhelmingly about protecting the reputation of the church and avoiding scandal. There was little evidence that he was concerned to protect children from these priests.

On the issue of the member for Mirani, and I needed to listen to him twice, maybe three times, but I think his point was that the breaking of the power of the confessional would set a dangerous precedent to other professions such as lawyers. My question to him would be how can a party that poses as a party of law and order want to protect people who are protecting abusers? How can a person want to protect a person who is protecting someone who has committed hundreds of crimes and not being punished for that? I will let the member for Mirani justify that in the coming weeks.

I have spoken about Kevin Lynch. It was reported that two former headmasters had been informed of allegations against him and had not taken any action. Indeed, it was reported that one of them informed the abuser about the complaint. This bill aims to break that pattern of behaviour.

This bill is about making sure that institutions and the people inside them are accountable and liable. The bill tells those people that we will hold them complicit if they move around or cover-up for offenders. If the LNP is talking about a register, I point out that none of the institutions would have been on that register. None of the men I have talked about would have been on the register until after they had been in jail for a long time or were dead. In the meantime, for decades they were free to practise abuse because they were so-called trusted members of our local communities. I hope this bill puts an end to the practice of moving around and hiding abusers. I hope they face justice much earlier instead of having decades of impunity in which to operate.

I end by paying tribute to the victims of childhood sexual abuse who have spoken out and called attention to how perpetrators have persisted and been protected. I echo the fine sentiments of the Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, when he said to those victims: I see you, I hear you, I believe you. I commend the bill to the House.