




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

Record of Proceedings, 29 November 2023

VICTIMS OF CRIME ASSISTANCE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (3.29 pm): I rise in support of the Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Queenslanders who have suffered due to acts of violence committed against them, their children or loved ones, or who have been harmed by witnessing an act of violence, need and deserve our support. Victim-survivors of domestic and family violence must not be forgotten in the often rancorous public discourse about crime. It is not often acknowledged just how much of the violent crime in our communities is, in fact, domestic and family violence. It is domestic and family violence where a perpetrator will inflict untold and escalating harm against their victim or victims, then go on to repeat the pattern in subsequent relationships, against their own children and even against their own pets. With domestic and family violence too often deliberately designed to systematically take apart every aspect of a victim's life—their job, their self-esteem, their family relationships and friendship networks, their financial security—improving the financial support that is available to those victims in the aftermath is crucial.

Currently, Victim Assist Queensland supports victims in their recovery by covering a range of expenses incurred because of the crime. These might include medical and counselling fees, legal costs, relocation expenses or funeral costs. Victims, as we have heard, can also apply for one-off special assistance payments, depending on the type of crime they have experienced. This bill proposes substantial increases in these special assistance payments across each of the various categories. Crucially, the bill reclassifies domestic and family violence from category D to category B, which will mean that the payments for victims of domestic and family violence will increase from \$1,000 to \$9,000.

As the minister stated in his introductory speech, these amendments are intended to better recognise the serious and detrimental effect of domestic and family violence on victim-survivors and ensure they can receive increased financial assistance to support them in their recovery. The amount of \$9,000 will make a huge difference to a victim-survivor of domestic and family violence who might be trying to rebuild her life. It will help secure accommodation, replace personal belongings and pay for professional support for the survivor and their children. The response from sector organisations like DVConnect has been positive. They stated—

This change would be a compassionate and respectful decision and will go a long way to ensuring that victims of serious crime, which include domestic and family violence, will have an opportunity to heal and recover with dignity, as they should expect.

Aged and Disability Australia described the proposed reform as 'a critical step in heralding in the institutional and community cultural changes which are required to recognise and address the prevalence and severity of domestic and family violence in Queensland'.

Importantly, these increased financial assistance measures also mean that victims of sexual offences will receive greater financial support. I am sure that we can all join in recognising the importance of that. As outlined in the committee's report, there has been a marked increase in applications to Victim Assist Queensland in recent years, most notably after the Victims of Crime

Assistance Act was amended to extend assistance to victims of domestic and family violence. In fact, in 2022-23 the number of applications by victims of domestic and family violence crime rose 87.8 per cent, from 2,300 to 4,337 applications the following year. Our government welcomes that increase because, while any victim of domestic and family violence is one too many, if people have been harmed by those who are meant to love them they need support, and I am glad that they are reaching out for help. It has created pressures on Victim Assist Queensland. The proposed reforms contained in the bill form part of a wider range of reforms that the Palaszczuk government is implementing, including increased funding to engage more staff within Victim Assist Queensland so that applications for financial assistance can be processed faster. Since we committed that additional funding, the department advised that the time taken to process applications has reduced by approximately 65 per cent.

I note the LNP's statement of reservation in the committee's report where they voice concerns about the increased cost of supporting victims following the extension of victim support payments to domestic and family violence survivors. It may not suit the LNP's narrative, but domestic and family violence is by far the most common type of crime against the person that Queenslanders face. It is the type of crime that takes 70 to 80 per cent of police resources and it is the type of crime that often has the most extreme impacts on Queenslanders, attacking their mental health, their personal wellbeing, their housing, their financial security and even their lives.

Importantly, this bill also takes steps to better incorporate victims' perspectives into sentencing, specifically by expanding the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council's membership from 12 to 14 and requiring the inclusion of at least one member with lived experience as a victim of crime. The Queensland Family and Child Commission submitted to the committee—

Broadening the membership of the QSAC to include a representative for victims would be a crucial step in amplifying the voices of victims, particularly children and young individuals, and advocating for their needs when developing sentencing recommendations for the judiciary.

The Australian Lawyers Alliance stated—

... adequate government compensation for victims of crime is part of a wider social and legislative trend towards greater recognition of the importance of the interests of the victims of crime in the criminal process.

Our government recognises the long-lasting effects of crime on individuals, families and communities, and we are committed to putting the needs of victims at the forefront and making sure they are heard. The reforms contained in this bill provide immediate and targeted action to ensure victims of crime and their families have the support they need to recover and rebuild their lives. These changes are just one aspect of our government's bigger reforms to the way victims of crime experience the criminal justice system and the way they experience policing. We have seen multiple inquiries into those matters over the last few years. There is a lot of work that remains to be done to implement those learnings and take all of the steps that we can take to better tailor our systems to meet the needs of victims of crime.

Along with the committee, I acknowledge the work of Victim Assist Queensland, the Queensland Police Service and the many community organisations that provide vital support to Queenslanders and their families who are victims of violent crime. In my electorate I want to particularly acknowledge our domestic violence organisations, which all work enormously hard, show enormous commitment and are working every day to find every option they can to better assist Queenslanders at a time when they can feel that every system, every organisation, has been weaponised against them. That work is so important.

I think both sides of the parliament recognise that there is more to do to both improve our responses to victims and prevent domestic and family violence in the first place. It is a wicked problem, and all of us recognise the impacts it has on Queenslanders. I know that we all share a desire to see the best possible outcome for people who have experienced those terrible situations. This bill is a reflection of our collective responsibility to those affected by crime and our dedication to creating a more supportive and just Queensland. It acknowledges the hardships that victims endure and is our commitment to making sure they have the resources they need to rebuild and recover in the aftermath of experiencing violent crime. I commend the bill to the House.