




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION (COMBATING COERCIVE CONTROL) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (4.59 pm): I, too, rise to make a contribution to the Domestic and Family Violence Protection (Combating Coercive Control) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. A number of other speakers—in fact, probably all other speakers—have talked about how there have now been a number of elements of legislative reform in this space. I think all have reflected that it is well and truly long overdue. It is welcome. There are certainly questions around whether it could have happened sooner. The fact that it is happening is important. The fact that it is happening is changing lives. The fact that it is happening is saving lives. I certainly want to add my support for all measures in this space. I think they are incredibly important. They are incredibly important in delivering community safety. They are incredibly important in delivering family safety.

I do reflect, as a minister in the LNP government between 2012 and 2015, that much of this would not have happened had we not commissioned the *Not now, not ever* report. I know that much time has passed since that initial report, that we are still implementing recommendations from that report, that there is a tonne of work for us as a parliament and as a community to continue to do in addressing domestic and family violence, but that report was instrumental in changing the discussion, changing the way it is perceived, changing the way we as a parliament are reacting, changing the way the Police Service is reacting and changing the way families are reacting to what was pretty much a hidden and unspoken about issue within our community.

I want to address the aspect of this bill around coercive control. It is in the title. It is deemed to be an important part of this legislation. I want to do so because, even as recently as three weeks ago, a constituent came to me—I will not name the constituent or address the matters the constituent raised with me, even though they pertain to someone known to this individual—saying, 'I'm aware that criminalisation of coercive domestic violence is still not enacted, so I'm wanting to raise my concerns with you as no-one else appears to have any powers to act on this matter.' They went on to say that they were aware of a DV situation where coercive DV continues to be used. The fact that, even as recently as three weeks ago, I had constituents coming to me with this concern shows just how important it is that we as a parliament address this and address it quickly.

Fortunately, I was able to go back to that constituent and say that the legislation was before the parliament and had been through the committee process. I was able to share the committee's report and show that there was a strong level of bipartisan support for these changes, that the changes were going to address the concerns this constituent had and that it was just a matter of knowing when we as a parliament would actually get to debating this. I had an inkling that it would be quickly. I am pleased that it was quickly. I am pleased that it is one of the bills we are addressing this week and that I will be able to go back to the constituent at the end of this week and say that we have addressed the concerns they had. I hope that it makes a difference to the situation they shared with me. I really do.

The reason that I think perhaps it will be that, whilst coercive control was already in the legislation, there were really no definitions about what it meant. The amendments in this bill include a reference to a pattern of behaviour and make it clear that domestic violence includes behaviour that may occur over a period of time. It includes individual acts that, when considered cumulatively, are abusive, threatening, coercive or cause fear and must be considered in the context of the relationship as a whole. It is my true hope and belief that those changes will address many of the concerns of this constituent and, to be blunt, a number of constituents over the years. This was not clearly defined and therefore the courts were not able to act on this kind of behaviour.

A very dear friend of mine is Councillor Fiona Cunningham. I have known her for many years. I know what she has done since the tragic circumstances involving Hannah Clarke. I know how important these matters are to her. I hope and pray that in passing this legislation we are actually achieving an outcome that will mean we never see a repeat of that.

I do want to raise two concerns. They are not about the wording of the legislation but about how particularly the government—but even we as a parliament—makes certain that these laws are actually effective. I refer to the Queensland Audit Office's report *Keeping people safe from domestic and family violence*, released in November last year. It found that the government does very little assessment and evaluation of its measures, meaning it often does not know what is working and what resources are needed. We saw today in *Courier-Mail* articles released by victims of crime calling on the government, the opposition and crossbench to come clean with statistics, report them to the public, be clear on what we are seeking to implement and make sure we actually are implementing what we say we are implementing. That Audit Office report says the same. If we are going to make these changes, let's at least measure whether they are producing the results we desire.

I have heard members say that this will increase the number of police referrals and the amount of police action, but that is only one measure. We also need to measure whether, when these matters are brought before courts, these laws are creating better outcomes for those who are the victims of coercive control. We need to be sharing that information with Queenslanders so that they have confidence that the legislative reforms we have made are producing the results we hope they will produce.

I return to the matter of police resourcing, because that is also picked up by the Queensland Audit Office in terms of the government not knowing what is working and what resources are needed. I think the member of Scenic Rim talked about the fact that Ian Leavers, in his contribution to the committee hearing, said that one officer had come to him and said, 'We should stop being called general duties police; we should be called domestic violence police, because that's all we're doing for eight hours, each and every shift.' I can attest to the fact that, anecdotally, a lot of sworn police officers on the front line in the electorate of Glass House are reporting the same. On the one hand, I am ecstatic that that is the case. I am ecstatic that particularly women are coming forward and reporting instances of domestic and family violence and that police are taking them seriously and are investigating them. I think that is a fantastic outcome. The downside is that we simply do not have the police resources on the ground to not only address domestic and family violence but also do all of the other things we expect of our frontline police officers. I do not want to reflect on other legislation, but you do begin to wonder whether things like hooning, break and enters and vehicle theft are not able to be responded to as quickly as we would hope and the community would expect because all of our officers are rightly focusing on domestic and family violence. I do not want that to change, but I want to make sure that our stations are staffed with sufficient numbers of police officers to do not only that but also all of the other community safety roles that we expect and thank our police officers for doing, day in and day out.

They are my primary concerns around this piece of legislation. Having implemented them, we should make sure we have the measures to measure and report honestly back to the community on their success or otherwise. If they are not working, let's come back and change them again. If they are working, fantastic. The other aspect is that we resource the various aspects of the government, particularly the police, to implement these legislative changes.

On that note, I acknowledge my support for this bill. I hope that it does produce changes, particularly for individuals such as the one shared with me by one of my constituents. I hope that it produces a safer outcome for the individuals involved, particularly for the children involved, in that case and in any other cases.