




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

Record of Proceedings, 22 February 2023

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

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (2.47 pm): I rise to address the Domestic and Family Violence Protection (Combating Coercive Control) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. At the outset, I acknowledge the long campaign by those who have suffered from domestic and family violence which has brought us to the point where the parliament is now taking steps to tackle what has been and continues to be a persistent challenge for our community. I particularly acknowledge the families of those who have lost their lives at the hands of violent offenders—people like Lloyd and Sue Clarke, whose advocacy after their daughter, Hannah, and their three beautiful grandchildren were murdered so horrifically some three years ago has been an inspiration.

Like every single Queenslander, I am sick and saddened to see the rate at which women and children are dying and suffering at the hands of violent and abusive family members and former partners—violent offenders who are supposed to love and care for them and should be their biggest protector but at times are their abuser. As we debate this bill now, the number of Queensland women and children who live in fear of what might happen tonight or tomorrow is far too high. There has not been nearly enough progress over recent years to implement laws that keep them safe. We say time and time again that community safety should be every government's first priority, which is why it is so frustrating to know that since this government came into power eight years ago there have been almost 400 recommendations handed to them to assist in preventing domestic, sexual and family violence in Queensland, but the implementation of those recommendations has been painfully slow.

It would be easy to view this criticism through the lens of one critical politician, but the government's failure to act in a timely manner is implicitly acknowledged in the recent Call for Change recommendations. It is why the commissioner felt the need to detail strict time lines for the recommendations from that report to be implemented. It is a damning report on the actions of this government.

I support the recommendations of the *Hear her voice* report that have been brought forward in this legislation. That report is powerful, and we must not just hear the voice of every woman but we need to listen and act swiftly on what is being said. The abhorrent misuse of power in any relationship should be a crime. Consistent and repeated threats, intimidation and humiliation should be a criminal offence, and those who utilise abusive methods of control should be held to account for their actions in a court of law. Women should never feel trapped in a relationship, and government should do everything in its power to ensure that every woman has a way out. We, as a society in general, should be extending a safe hand however we can.

I also support the modernisation of sexual offence language, but we must get this language right. The government's last-minute approach could cause more harm than good. I note the many submissions made by stakeholders, including those who hold concerns, as we do on this side of the House, when it comes to updating the language being used. When it comes to a sexual relationship with a child, it is abuse. There is no other word for such an unthinkable act committed by the worst of

the worst. It is not a sexual relationship; it is sexual abuse. Language that is used in the law cannot continue to be sanitised to be made more palatable. Nothing about sexual assault or sexual abuse is palatable. The language needs to fit the subject matter regardless of whether or not it is unsettling.

Like all members of parliament, I often hear from victims of domestic and family violence. No corner of Queensland is immune to the suffering happening behind closed doors. They come to me as their local member scared because they do not know where else to turn. They have tried everything else. I also hear from frustrated local police who feel like their hands are tied when it comes to acting on, and preventing, domestic violence. They are weighed down by paperwork, forced to spend hours off the road doing DV applications through an interim order and subsequent civil court process when they could be charging domestic violence offenders with a criminal offence, instituting a permanent order or bail conditions that would protect the victim there and then, and imposing a consequence for the actions of the offender more quickly. Daily we trust our police to make judgements about the use of force. We trust our police to make judgements about when to charge and when to caution young offenders and we trust our police to deal with all manner of sensitive situations like suicide, yet we tie their hands through the current domestic violence protection order process.

As I alluded to in my opening comments, not-for-profit and community groups have been doing their utmost to make a difference. I have spoken many times in the House about DV Safe Phone. It was founded during COVID by a former Buderim resident, now Kawana resident, Ashton Wood. I am pleased that many members of parliament, and indeed the parliament itself, have taken up the offer of using their electorate offices as a phone collection point for DV Safe Phone. The phones that are donated through that process are repurposed, refurbished and given to support agencies right across Australia to be provided to victims of domestic and family violence as a lifeline. It is the kind of tangible support that makes the world of difference to someone suffering in an abusive situation. One of the first things those who abuse their partner through coercive techniques target is the victim's mobile phone. By confiscating or smashing the victim's phone the abuser seeks to further isolate the victim. The phones provided through DV Safe Phone by Ashton and his team are a lifeline in every sense of the word for the victims of domestic and family violence, and I commend them for their work.

Before I finish today I want to address the issue of the measurement, reporting and evaluation of government programs. In the insightful *Keeping people safe from domestic and family violence* report handed down by the Queensland Audit Office in November last year, the point was made very forcefully that the state government does very little assessment and evaluation of the measures they implement. The result is that the government, and by extension the community, is unable to determine what actions are working, what is not working, and consequently how resources need to be reallocated or allocated to improve the situation. As the Audit Office stated—

Queensland's approach does not have the coordination, structure and systems necessary to support family and relationship units. We have seen it this week. We see it time and time again. The Palaszczuk Labor government is more interested in how things look than how things are. Queenslanders deserve better, particularly on an issue as important as domestic and family violence.

In conclusion, the LNP will be supporting this legislation because it will improve things for the victims of domestic and family violence, but progress has been too slow. This legislation is not perfect, but it is an improvement on the existing situation. The approach by the government to date has been inadequate, and it continues to be inadequate. Queenslanders rightly expect the government to put community safety first. I call on the government to act on the many sensible and considered recommendations from the many reports this government has commissioned over the years so that we can address this issue for the betterment of all Queenslanders.