




Speech By
Brent Mickelberg

MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

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**VICTIMS OF CRIME ASSISTANCE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (6.44 pm): I rise to address the Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. At the outset I want to address the comments of the member for Logan, who, despite his assertion that he did not want to politicise this issue, was very selective with the time frame he chose. He spoke about the decoupling in 2021 but ignored the fact that between 2015 and 2021 his Labor government similarly adopted the same approach that he was so critical of in relation to the LNP government. He sought to minimise the instance of crime within the community, as many members opposite have done in their contributions to this debate today, and yet page 1 of this committee report drafted by—

Mr POWER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Pause the clock.

Mr POWER: I take deep personal offence that I sought to minimise anyone and I ask that he withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will seek some advice. Member, can you advise what comment you took offence to?

Mr POWER: The member for Buderim said that I sought to minimise the impact of crime on victims. I think that is extraordinarily deeply offensive, it is completely untrue and is not a reflection of the balanced way I made that speech.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member. Member for Buderim, the member for Logan has taken offence to your comments. Do you withdraw?

Mr MICKELBERG: I withdraw. To be clear, the committee's own report drafted by a Labor committee chair, signed off by the member for Bancroft, says on page 1—

Reported instances of crime and the number of victims of crime have markedly increased in Queensland in recent years.

This is a Labor report with a Labor chair and that is a quote from the report. To suggest that crime is not increasing in Queensland is ridiculous.

Mr Whiting: Read the whole three paragraphs.

Mr MICKELBERG: I am happy to read all three paragraphs if you would like. Let us read the next part since the member for Bancroft would like me to read the rest of it into *Hansard*. It states—

The Queensland Government Statisticians Office Crime Report for 2021-22, reported 64,540 victims of offences against the person, a 49.2 per cent increase in total recorded victims reported in 2020-21. In addition, there was a 54.4 per cent increase in financial assistance applications received by Victim Assist Queensland in 2022-23 (7,621) when compared with 2021-22 (4,935).

The problem is getting worse. The problem is getting worse and those opposite seek to minimise the impact of this problem on the community. I acknowledge that this is a complex problem. This is a complex problem with many social factors that are feeding it, but at its heart the issue of this

government's response to crime and to youth crime across this state has been a lack of willingness to address the problem and admit there is a problem. How many times have we heard members opposite oppose breach of bail—talk about the fact that breach of bail will not work—and yet when the political pressure becomes too much they come in here and do a 180 on their position and support it? If you do not support the position because you do not think it will work, do not turn around and hypocritically change the position just to support a political outcome. There is a real impact on our community as a consequence of the crime that our community is facing. The member for Burnett and the member for Oodgeroo spoke articulately in relation to that in their statement of reservation to this bill.

I want to address a couple of the comments that have been made. I, too, would associate myself with the member for Logan in relation to the member for Cooper and her experience, and I have spoken in the past about the fact that I think that is an important asset that the member for Cooper brings to this House. However, I do want to take issue with a couple of things she raised. She spoke about the narrative around young criminals—and I am paraphrasing here—distorting and resulting in outcomes which make the problem worse. With regard to some of the examples that she gave about vigilante-type responses, no-one supports that. The LNP does not support vigilante responses, but they are a response that is reflective of the fact that the community does not feel safe, that the community feels that it is not able to rely on the institution of the state to keep it safe.

There needs to be a balance. There need to be consequences when people do the wrong thing. It is my contention that that balance is not there. No-one wants to see every young person locked up the first time they commit an offence, but if an individual is a serious repeat offender they should be locked up. They should be held to account for their actions. There needs to be a balance and the balance is not there.

The member for Cooper also spoke about the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. She made the point that she was on the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council and the LNP removed that Sentencing Advisory Council. She made the point that she was a victim advocate on that Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. I am sure she played an important role in that capacity. The fact is that we are here, nine years down the track under this Labor government, and there is no victim advocate on the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. This is an important measure. Since June last year we have been calling for a victim advocate on the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. It is a welcome measure. It is a false argument to try to draw a parallel and suggest that the LNP has created or exacerbated this problem through its actions nine years ago when the Labor Party have not addressed this in the nine years they have been in government. This government has been in power three times longer than the LNP were in government. I find it a tad galling every time those opposite come in here and talk about the problems of the past. It says a lot about the government's delivery on these problems that they like to talk about the problems of the Newman government but not about their own record on these issues. That is disappointing.

While I am referring to the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council, I say that I am good friends with Judge John Robertson, the former chair. I would like to pay tribute to him. I frequently have conversations with him over a coffee. We have different views on what sentences should be applied in many cases, but we are able to have those conversations respectfully, we are able to have those conversations constructively and we are able to disagree. I think what both of us would accept is that our community needs to both feel safe and be safe, and right now I am not sure that is the case. I accept that there are different views in the community, but the overwhelming view of my constituents is that they do not feel safe.

In their contribution to the bill the LGAQ spoke about the fact that small businesses have been ignored in relation to the crime problem affecting Queensland. In my capacity as the shadow minister for small and family business it is certainly feedback that I get when I travel the state, and I have raised it here in the House. I have spoken to businesses in Townsville, Cairns, Yeppoon, Rockhampton, Hervey Bay, Toowoomba and Gracemere, just to name a few. All of those businesses have been impacted. They talk about the impact not just on the business owner but also on their staff and on the community they support.

I remember meeting with owners of a strip of businesses in Yeppoon. It was seven different businesses including a FoodWorks, a butcher and a fish and chip shop. They had been broken into repeatedly, week on week, and the police knew who these young criminals were. They would arrest them and they would be released on bail. That is the simple fact of what these communities are dealing with. When businesses are broken into they have to close their doors, cancel shifts, replace stock, pay for repairs and cop an increase to their premiums. The reality is that the businesses then need to pass that on to their customers in the form of increased prices or they have to wear the costs. We are not talking about multibillion dollar businesses here; we are talking about mum-and-dad businesses in our regional communities that are suffering.

I met with a restaurant business owner in Hervey Bay. He had been broken into by what he would contend—and what I understand from speaking to the police—was the same group of individuals who had committed a lot of other offences across their community, yet there was no consequence for them because of their age. I would contend that that is not getting the balance right. I think we need to do more to support not only small and family businesses but also our entire community.

The measures that are in the bill are welcome steps. I do not oppose the measures at all. We want to see a victim advocate on the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. We want to see greater action to address the impact of crime in our communities. For those opposite to suggest that the LNP is causing this problem to become worse through the public narrative around the issue is a false argument and I do not accept it. I do not think the community accepts it either. I am pretty confident that if I was to step into nearly any community in this state they would tell me that they feel like the incidence of crime has increased, in particular the instances of crime against the person. That is the key issue we sometimes lose here.

We are talking about a higher rate of recidivism with serious young offenders in particular. Something is not working. This is why we want to see greater action from the government. We want to see greater resourcing. Victim Assist is an important measure to support victims. There is obviously going to be an increase in demand, so the government's measure to increase those thresholds is a welcome one. I have spoken, as many members of this House have, with victims of crime who have not received the service they should have from Victim Assist. The message to the government is that we want to see more action to address the crime crisis affecting Queensland.