




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 29 November 2023

VICTIMS OF CRIME ASSISTANCE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (3.37 pm): I rise to address the debate on the Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. The primary objectives of the bill are detailed as making changes to the following: firstly, the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009 to increase the upper limits for financial assistance payments and special assistance payments available to victims, increase the upper limits payable for funeral expenses and distress payments and also recategorise domestic violence as a category B act of violence for the purpose of special assistance payments; and, secondly, to amend the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 to increase the membership of the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council to no more than 14 members to enable the appointment of a person with lived experience as a victim of crime and another person and require that at least one member of the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council must be a person with lived experience as a victim of crime.

The bill proposes to adjust the type and financial amount eligible for compensation for certain victim categories. To provide greater support specific to victims of acts of domestic and family violence, the bill increases the categorisation of acts of domestic and family violence to increase the amount of special assistance that victim-survivors can receive. To achieve this objective, acts of domestic and family violence will be recategorised from being a category D act of violence to a category B act of violence.

The proposed amendments contained in the bill will increase the special assistance payments for victims of acts of domestic and family violence from \$1,000 to \$9,000. The government has approved funding of \$185 million over five years from 2023-24 and \$40 million per annum ongoing from 2028-29 to enable increased payments of financial assistance to victims of crime under the Financial Assistance Scheme. This will need to be monitored to ensure that funding matches any increases in applications and that Victim Assist Queensland is adequately resourced so that payments are made in a timely manner. Whilst this compensation will be welcomed by many, it has become even more necessary because of Labor's crime crisis, which is burning right across Queensland.

There were 12 submissions made to the bill and all but one of those submissions supported the bill. The submitters included Bravehearts, the Mareeba Shire Council, the Justice Reform Initiative, knowmore, the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Interim Victims' Commissioner. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service supported the bill and took the opportunity to raise the ongoing delays in processing applications under the Victims of Crime Assistance Act and the impact that that has had on victims. The Local Government Association of Queensland also raised the need to consider support for small businesses impacted by violent crime.

The Liberal National Party has been calling on the government to add a victim to the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. The LNP was originally derided but, yet again, the Labor government has seen sense and adopted that, and it is important that they do so. It could be said that, once again, the Liberal National Party is leading from opposition and the government is following our lead.

Victims have felt silenced by the government over a long period. They feel that their needs have not been heard. That has been occurring in my electorate of Moggill and right across the western suburbs of Brisbane. There is no doubt that crime has been extremely problematic. Local residents regularly contact me to discuss their concerns about break and enter offences and car theft. Recently, on one particular night, multiple businesses across Kenmore and Chapel Hill were broken into. The business owners have told me not only about the violation of their premises and the fact that they feel unsafe but also about the disruption to their businesses and the flow-on effects as far as insurance costs are concerned. The government certainly needs to do more. They need to understand the impacts of crime in not only Brisbane and South-East Queensland but also right across Queensland.

I take this opportunity to talk about the issues related to the DNA debacle in Queensland. The widespread issues related to the DNA lab have been well covered by the acting shadow Attorney-General and member for Nanango, Deb Frecklington. I take this opportunity to acknowledge Dr Kirsty Wright for her courage in identifying and exposing the systemic governance issues related to DNA testing within Queensland Health's Forensic and Scientific Services laboratory. The abject failures under the Labor government have been extraordinary. The Liberal National Party had been raising the extensive issues related to the laboratory for a long period prior to the reviews being commenced by the government. As with most issues under this government, for a substantial period Labor deflected, denied, deferred and refused to act.

The issues that we have seen here in Queensland have really been quite extraordinary. It has to be said that the circumstances surrounding the Queensland Forensic and Scientific Services laboratory have led to one of the greatest failures of our state's judicial system. There are still thousands of victims who deserve justice and the government needs to ensure that they receive justice. Whilst the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services, the member for Waterford, might want people to move on, the victims of Labor's DNA crisis cannot simply move on. They need justice and they deserve justice. The Liberal National Party will continue to fight for justice for all of those victims because it is the right thing to do not only by them but by their families as well. They need to be supported. Many issues still need to be individually and collectively prosecuted on their behalf. The Liberal National Party will continue to do that now and well and truly into the future.

The fact that no-one has been held accountable for this episode is shameful. It casts a long, dark shadow over the Labor government. There has not been full accountability and ministerial accountability for this episode.

The Liberal National Party is broadly supportive of the government's amendments that have been circulated as part of this debate related to the issues that have been identified in relation to the laboratory. However, there are still many unanswered questions and concerns as to how far those amendments will go and whether they will achieve the substantial reforms and other changes that need to take place.

In conclusion, I acknowledge all members of the committee who scrutinised the legislation. They do important work here in Queensland in compiling their reports, and certainly the secretariat does as well. They need to be commended for all of the work that they do in relation to looking at legislation, compiling reports and preparing that for all members of parliament to refer to when they contribute to the debates on such legislation.