




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOK

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VICTIMS OF CRIME ASSISTANCE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (2.25 pm): I rise today to speak on the Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. I want to acknowledge the prior work carried out by the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee before the bill was transferred to the Community Support and Services Committee. I thank the committee chair, Peter Russo, members of the committee, the committee secretariat and Hansard.

The committee consulted far and wide on this bill, giving communities in rural and regional parts of Queensland an opportunity to also have a say. Hearings were held in Brisbane, Cairns, the Gold Coast, Ipswich, Logan, Rockhampton and Townsville, where the committee got to hear directly from witnesses about how these reforms would further support victims of crime deal with the trauma of crime.

The Legal Affairs and Safety Committee report recommendations focused on improving the coordination of services, reviewing the Charter of Victims' Rights, facilitating easy access to information, developing a trauma informed training framework across government agencies, investing in support services for victims, developing a long-term plan for restorative justice and providing youth justice conferencing.

It would be a much better world if crime did not exist. Unfortunately, that is not the world we live in. Crime occurs every day and it does not discriminate. Crime could happen to anyone, at any one time and often a single act of violence can change the course of someone's life forever. The remnant of crime is often felt long after the crime has occurred, with individuals and also families carrying the ongoing burden of coming to terms with their trauma. Crime victims often suffer a broad range of psychological, social and financial issues. The impact of crime often manifests intense feelings of anger, fear, isolation, low self-esteem, helplessness and depression. They are common reactions and it is clear to see why when referring to types of crime described in the bill.

Category A covers attempted murder or rape. Category B includes attempted offences of category A, sexual offences and grievous bodily harm. Category C includes attempted offences of category B, serious assault and robbery. Category D includes attempted offences of category C, assault and unlawful stalking. Again, crime does not discriminate and it comes in all different forms. No-one is truly safe from an act of crime, but it is important that we have the right measures in place to assist and support people impacted by an act of crime.

The Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 proposes to amend Queensland's financial assistance scheme and increase the maximum amount of financial assistance payable to victims of crime. It also changes the composition of the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. The financial assistance scheme is established under the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009 to: help victims of acts of violence recover from the acts by giving them financial assistance; give primary victims amounts representing a symbolic expression by the state of the community's recognition

of the injuries suffered by them; and give related victims who have suffered distress amounts representing a symbolic expression by the state of the community's recognition of the distress suffered by them.

The bill also proposes to amend the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 to: increase the representation of victims of crime by increasing the number of members on the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council from 12 to 14; enable the appointment of a person with lived experience as a victim of crime and another additional member. I am pleased that the reforms in this bill will include victims who have been impacted by domestic and family violence. Including victims of domestic and family violence will certainly increase the profile of domestic and family violence in our communities. I think that will be a positive step towards ensuring victims are captured by service systems so they have access to the appropriate support that is available to them.

It is worth noting that reported instances of crime and the number of victims of crime have markedly increased in Queensland in recent years. If we look at the stats for victims of domestic and family violence, the number of applications has significantly increased by 87.8 per cent—from 2,309 applications in 2021-22 to 4,337 applications. Following amendments to the Victims of Crime Assistance Act in 2017 which extended the eligibility for financial assistance to all victims of domestic and family violence, the number of financial assistance applications relating to this crime increased.

As someone who has worked with families of domestic and family violence, I am proud of the work we are doing in Queensland to strengthen our laws around domestic and family violence. I am pleased to know there is greater support for people impacted by domestic and family violence. The department advised that in respect to the 7,621 applications for financial assistance received in 2022-23, Victim Assist Queensland paid \$39.6 million to support 6,987 victims recovering from crime in Queensland. In addition to reimbursement for expenses, the financial scheme set out in the Victims of Crime Assistance Act provides a primary victim of crime with a special assistance payment. The special assistance payment is intended to represent a symbolic expression by the state of the community's recognition of the injuries suffered by the victim as the result of an act of violence.

I want to acknowledge some of the challenges being faced by older people, people with disability and young people who have been impacted by crime. It starts with access to information for services that are available to them, where to go and whom to see. Technology is a good example of the types of barriers that exist, because while technology is there to enhance access to information, as we have heard in the hearings this can also be a barrier for older people and people with disability. There are similar challenges for young people. One of the witnesses who presented at the public hearing in Brisbane spoke about the negative way young people are portrayed in the media and how it deters or delays a young person from accessing much needed support. The Brisbane Youth Service submission considered the plight of young people in the justice system and described two challenges specific to providing assistance to young victims of crime: the timing of emergency accommodation reimbursement requires an application process that cuts into the time available to assess the young person and devise a safety plan; and the \$10,000 recognition payment that accompanies an emergency accommodation reimbursement can reach the young person before assistance is provided to the young person to appropriately budget and manage the payment, resulting in poor outcomes including increased drug use, misguided purchases, coercion or theft. Brisbane Youth Service suggested that additional payments be delayed or paid in instalments.

The bill's primary function is to support victims of crime and their families via amendments to the Victims of Crime Assistance Act to increase the maximum limit of financial assistance. There are also special considerations for payments to children. Payments are provided to the Public Trustee to be held in trust under the Public Trustee Act until the child or victim of crime under the age of 18 turns 18.

I fully support the amendments in this bill. There is so much in this bill that reaches out to people who are vulnerable to crime, people who have been affected by crime, and people who suffer ongoing challenges in dealing with their trauma. In conclusion, this is a good bill. It is much needed and it will make a huge difference to the lives of those people who need it most. I commend the bill to the House.