




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (3.09 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 for one simple reason: I, like all members on this side of the House, support victims. We understand the impact that crime has on victims and, more importantly, we need to bring the voice of victims to this chamber. There would be not a day that goes by when I am not contacted by a victim of crime in this state—victims whose homes or businesses have been broken into, victims whose vehicles have been stolen and victims who have been assaulted. It is a fact that since this government came to power the rate of assault has more than doubled, the rate of stalking has more than tripled and the rate of breach of domestic violence protection orders has more than doubled. The universal message from my conversations with these victims is: why will the government not do something about crime in this state and why will they not listen to those victims? Today is a start. While this government and their mates in Canberra claim that crime is a media beat-up, the fact is we have more victims who not only need support but deserve support.

I note that this bill proposes amendments to the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009 to: increase the upper limits for financial assistance payments, special assistance payments, distress payments and funeral expenses; and to recategorise domestic violence as a category B act. The bill will also amend the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 to increase the membership of the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council to facilitate the appointment of a victim of crime. All of the amendments proposed by this bill are important, and it is the amendments to the Penalties and Sentences Act that offer the biggest opportunity.

Like other members on this side of the House, I engaged with victims of crime long before I was elected. It is easy to talk about crime, but it is more important to understand the real effects that crime has on victims. It is not until you have seen the look on a victim's face and seen the real fear in their eyes that you gain an appreciation of the impact that crime has on victims. Understanding the real impact on victims is the reason the opposition has called for the inclusion of a victim on the Sentencing Advisory Council. Those of us on this side of the House know that Queenslanders want offenders held to account and we know that sentences must be used to deter crime and as a punishment. It is a basic concept that an offender is punished based on the harm done to a victim, and no-one understands the harm more than the victims themselves.

I want to move on to the amendments related to extending the time a DNA sample taken from a suspect is able to be kept. The fact that this amendment is needed confirms the failures of this government. DNA is essential evidence, often used to charge offenders with some of the most heinous crimes in our state. Despite that importance, minister after minister has denied there was even a problem. Even when problems were identified in the media, this government was more concerned about reputation than the victims of crime.

While the Minister for Health bears ultimate responsibility for Forensic and Scientific Services, it is a fact that the Queensland Police Service is its biggest client. Despite the importance of DNA in the investigation of offences, we know that the police minister took six months to ask for a briefing. Despite the fact that DNA is used to put murderers, rapists and serious sex offenders behind bars, the police minister did not assess these matters as serious. It is a fact that it was only the media and the opposition who dragged the truth into the light. It is a fact that up to 103,000 samples relating to 37,000 cases now need to be retested, and that is why this amendment is needed.

Despite all their rhetoric about supporting victims, it has now been almost a year since the findings of the first commission of inquiry were provided to this government. This amendment should have and could have been brought before the House months ago. The fact that we have violent offenders walking around our community today who should be behind bars is a blight on this government.

In contrast to a government that has fought against every review and inquiry, those on this side of the House have stood strong for victims. In contrast to a government that denied there was a problem, those on this side of the House will continue to stand strong for victims of crime in this state. Standing with victims is exactly why we have called—and still are calling—for a standing commission of inquiry which would offer the oversight and powers to ensure victims get the justice they deserve. If this government were serious about supporting victims they would agree to a standing commission of inquiry to ensure transparency and to ensure that clearing that backlog is prioritised to ensure justice is delivered.

A standing commission of inquiry would also ensure the same mistakes are not made again. It would ensure that victims are treated with respect—unlike the current situation, where victims have not been communicated with. Perhaps the reason this government will not support a standing commission of inquiry is that such an inquiry may well identify who should be held accountable for this failure. Here we are debating legislation focused on victims of crime and holding offenders to account, but at the same time we have a government that will not hold anyone to account for the failures at the state-run Forensic and Scientific Services.

The opposition recognise that it is victims who carry the lion's share of the effects of crime. Those victims deserve a system that is adequately resourced and acts in a timely manner and a system that has adequate oversight. Money does not bring back a loved one and money, in many cases, cannot wash away the pain, but it certainly helps. I would call on the minister to ensure that victim-of-crime payments are prioritised and processed in a timely manner, because we are hearing of time frames of up to three and four years and that is not good enough.

Those of us on this side of the House join with victims in calling for this government to step up to the plate. Along with victims, we call for this government to acknowledge the effect that crime has on victims and to ensure the failures within Forensic and Scientific Services are never repeated. I will be supporting this legislation and the amendments to ensure justice for victims, and I call on all members to do likewise.