




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOPER

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CHILD PROTECTION (OFFENDER REPORTING AND OFFENDER PROHIBITION ORDER) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (4.19 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the Child Protection (Offender Reporting and Offender Prohibition Order) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Much like the member for Maiwar yesterday, I also have chosen to rethink my speech in the past 24 hours. That is a shame, because I was looking forward to debating the original bill before the House. I think it is one worth celebrating. It is a bill that targets offenders who use technology to harm children online and a bill that in many ways is an Australian first. It is something of which our government and Queensland should be proud. The substantive bill, however, has been overshadowed by the amendments proposed for consideration in detail. That is where I will focus my contribution.

Children do not belong in watch houses. The second-last place I ever want to see a child is in a watch house. In response to the member for Maiwar's question yesterday: yes, I have visited young people in watch houses. It is awful. It is particularly confronting if you have not seen many places of detention before, because they feel undignified. There are issues with privacy. The smell can be overwhelming. The noise can be overwhelming. It is incredibly confronting.

I say to the House that there is a worse place you can visit a child: in a morgue. I would like to return serve and ask the member for Maiwar if he has ever had to do that. I have and I would not wish it upon anyone. I have gone with families to identify their loved one's body in the morgue. I have gone with victims to identify the weapons used against them that are still coated in blood and to pick up their bloodied clothing from hospitals. I have helped families organise the forensic clean for their home so that they do not have to wipe up the body parts of their loved ones themselves. I have gone with families to select caskets—something they never thought they would have to do in this lifetime. I have spoken to parents picking out suits in which to bury their children who have died at the hands of other young people. I have watched parents have to work carefully to bury their child in clothing that will conceal knife wounds or bruises.

I say to the member for Maiwar: if it comes down to a choice between visiting a child in one of these two places, I know which one I would pick every day of the week. The reality is that the children in detention are part of a much bigger story. If we are going to tell the story, let us tell it fully. For every child sitting in the Brisbane watch house right now—as confronting and as uncomfortable as that is—there is a victim of crime, most likely a victim of violent and personal crime, connected to that story. We should not forget them or their stories and the important need they have to be safe.

Regrettably, I have plenty of stories of victims who have had their lives impacted by acts of violence. Let me give two off the top of my head, with the warning that they do include graphic content. The first is of a mother I will call Janette, whose children were both murdered. Their bodies were discovered at the bottom of a quarry. They had been lured away by a young man who raped the girl and, in an attempt to hide that crime, threw them off a cliff to the quarry pit below. When the impact of that fall did not kill them, the offender stood at the top of the cliff and threw rocks down onto their bodies until they stopped moving. Her son was aged 11 and her daughter was just eight.

The second story is of another mother who I will call Amber. Amber's son was 16 when he fell in with what we would call the 'wrong crowd'. One night her son and his friends took a car and went into the bush, where they drank. Things escalated, and at some point during the night the boys conspired to harm Amber's son. They tortured him, stabbed him multiple times and eventually decapitated him. The things they did to Amber's son and his body are unspeakable.

Now, put yourselves in the shoes of Janette and Amber and convince me that our first priority should not be to support the victims and to protect the community from those who commit violent acts—even if they are children, as difficult as that is to accept. No one wants young people in watch houses—not me, not my community, not the legal sector and not the police. For the member for Maiwar to come in here and ask me to forget about what these young people did to end up where they are today is something I cannot do, because I cannot get the stories of victims like Janette and Amber out of my head.

I strongly encourage the member for Maiwar to meet with victims, which I know is something he does not do because they all end up coming to me. I am happy to organise a meeting for him with victims from his electorate to hear from them firsthand about the impacts of crime on their lives—to speak to their children who cannot sleep at night and cannot go to school anymore, who have lost the joy in their life. I think it might help the member to have that perspective.

Nothing about this amendment suggests that it is a net-widening exercise or that it would ameliorate a young person's rights any more than the status quo. This amendment legitimises the current practice of holding children in watch houses—temporarily—when detention centres are overcrowded and it is unsafe for them to be there and is unsafe for them to be transferred there. The substantive issue is that we as a government and we as a society should not be accepting this as the solution anymore. We must find a better way than this. I intend to continue to give the minister, law enforcement, our social services sector, our community legal sector and my local community every support that I can to help make that change happen.