




Speech By
Jonty Bush

MEMBER FOR COOPER

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

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (6.15 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I will start by addressing comments made by the member for Nanango—

Mr SPEAKER: Apologies, member. Members leaving the chamber, please do so quietly. There is a member seeking to make a contribution.

Ms BUSH: I will address comments made by the member for Nanango in the debate in relation to the select inquiry hearings that were held last week. I do not mind the member for Nanango. I am sure she has not meant to mislead the House in her statements, and I am not going to relive the inquiry of last week, but what I will do is encourage all members, and all members of the public in fact, to look at the transcripts that are now a matter of the public record and to review those in their entirety. The facts are there for all to see. I am not going to repeat them in this debate, but I will paraphrase or speak to a contribution from PeakCare. In PeakCare's words, we are grappling with a counterintuitive reality that crime is reducing and the fear of crime is increasing and that, rather than debate that, we should instead accept that both of those realities are true.

It was refreshing, actually, to hear the member for Lockyer acknowledge on the public record that crime trends are decreasing internationally, so perhaps there is hope for a bipartisan way yet. It is interesting that the LNP can acknowledge when crime is decreasing, but when a Labor member acknowledges that we are accused of trivialising crime victims' experiences. We all wish that we did not need a victims of crime sector, but crime does occur, and when it does we need to do everything we can to wrap around the victims affected, their families and their communities to help them get through that experience.

I am thrilled to see the next iteration of the Victims of Crime Assistance Act. I was one of the people at the table with the minister at the time we developed and introduced the original VoCA legislation in 2009. I want to acknowledge the agencies that have helped, over many decades, shape the victims landscape: the Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group with Brett Thompson as the CEO—he does a fantastic job; DVConnect; Bravehearts with Hetty Johnston and Carol Ronken, who is a great friend of mine who has done a fantastic job; Protect All Children Today; Living Well; Act for Kids; BRISSC; and the Gold Coast sexual assault service with the fabulous Di McLeod. Many champions of victims' rights over many years in Queensland have shaped the landscape that we have today.

That work continues. Today we are seeing the next iteration through this bill, which will build on Queensland's victims financial assistance scheme, increasing the maximum financial assistance for victims who have directly experienced an act of violence from \$75,000, which was the amount set in 2009, to \$120,000. In relation to witnesses of violent crimes, the VoCA legislation already had provisions

for witnesses of crime, and they were established in 2009 and set at \$50,000 in assistance for individuals affected. This will increase under this bill to \$75,000, which reflects the impact that witnesses, of course, feel. I am really pleased to see the funeral assistance uplift from \$8,000 to \$15,000. The costs of organising a funeral are huge. For victims of homicide, there are elements of that process that are particularly delicate. This uplift of funeral assistance will come as a huge relief in relation to homicide victims. I really want to thank the Queensland Homicide Victims' Support Group for their advocacy and for bringing this to the table.

Clause 13 of the bill proposes to recategorise acts of domestic violence, from category D to a more serious category B, in recognition of the serious nature of those particular acts of violence and rising reporting trends for that. I know that there will be victims of crime who will be watching the debate who have had experience of applying for victims assistance and who have experienced delays and rejections with their applications.

Even the best systems break down, and when they do people get really hurt. An independent review of the financial assistance scheme has started. The review will look at how we can make the scheme easier to access and how we can make that entire journey simpler for victims and kinder. Notably, we also have the appointment of our first Interim Victims' Commissioner, Jon Rouse. I would strongly urge victims who have had not a positive experience with any justice system to reach out to his office, because it is offices like these that can actually help. It is not the social media groups, as well intentioned as those groups are, that actually offer assistance.

I am pleased to see the inclusion of a victim-survivor on the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. The member for Nanango suggested that this was at the behest of the LNP. I remind the members opposite that I was appointed by the attorney-general at the time to the inaugural Sentencing Advisory Council for Queensland in 2010 as a victim of crime, so it has been a long practice of Labor governments to include people with lived experience. In fact, it was the Newman government and the member for Kawana—the now Deputy Leader of the Opposition and then attorney-general—that abolished the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. The LNP and the member for Kawana—the now Deputy Leader of the Opposition—in one of their early moves in government, abolished Queensland's first ever Sentencing Advisory Council. I was on it at the time. Not only did they abolish it as a first move, but I was a member and a victim of crime. I found out through the *Courier-Mail*, in fact, that I had lost my job—not directly through the government at the time. This is their history.

The final thing I will say on this debate is in relation to the narrative that is currently being perpetrated on this issue. The narrative around young people right now is toxic, and it has reached a level, in my view—

Mr Dametto interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Order, member!

Ms BUSH: I have calculated that I have approximately 12,900 days left in my one life and I can tell you how many days I am going to spend debating quantitative data analysis with the member for Hinchinbrook, and that is zero. The narrative is young people are toxic and it has reached, in my view, a level of vilification that is unacceptable. Telling a child—

Mr Dametto interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member for Hinchinbrook. Pause the clock. That interjection was unacceptable. You are warned under the standing orders.

A government member interjected.

Mr Dametto interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Member for Hinchinbrook, you can leave the chamber for one hour.

Whereupon the honourable member for Hinchinbrook withdrew from the chamber at 6.23 pm.

Ms BUSH: Telling a child—sometimes a 10-year-old child—over and over again that they are scum, that they should be subjected to the death penalty, that they should be hunted down, that they should be detained and isolated and never see the light of day does not make a young person stop offending—it actually makes everything a lot worse. The greatest threat to community safety is not necessarily the 12-year-old who is unsupervised in a suburb; it is the members here in this chamber. It is those of us in this room who cannot seem to move past party politics, who cannot or will not move the conversation beyond the reactive, predictable and tired 'who can be tougher' debate.

There are members in this room who are attempting to condition victims into thinking that the only way justice can be achieved is through locking more and more people up, not only in the absence of information that it helps but despite overwhelming evidence that punitive measures do not work. Children are not helped by this narrative. Victims are left feeling hopeless, helpless and confused and the community is not made any safer.

Finally, I acknowledge the victim support and advocacy agencies that made a submission to this inquiry. They were: Bravehearts, knowmore legal service, the Brisbane Youth Service and ADA Australia. Thank you to those agencies for speaking up for victims of crime in Queensland and ensuring they have a voice in the development of these bills. I commend the bill to the House.