




Speech By
Melissa McMahon

MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

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

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (12.10 pm): I rise to make a short contribution in relation to the Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Originally, I was not going to speak on this bill. I had read the committee report and when the announcements were made by the Premier I saw that there was resounding support for the objectives of this bill in terms of increasing financial assistance for victims and for victims having a greater say in a number of the statutory bodies that we have in the state. Understanding from the outset that the opposition would be supporting this bill, I did not see what I would necessarily have to contribute to this debate. However, listening to the opposition members supposedly support this bill—a bill which is there for the victims of crime—all I am hearing is electioneering and slogans. To stand here and say that they support victims of crime and then use an election slogan as part of it is really doing an injustice to victims right there and then. Victims of crime deserve a voice. They deserve to be heard. They do not deserve to be puppets. They do not deserve to be wheeled out, to be retraumatised, so someone can make a political point.

Mr McDonald: Say that to the victims!

Mrs McMAHON: I am a victim and I resent every time I see the opposition wheel out a victim just for the purpose of an electioneering slogan. I do not see any respect on that side. It turns my stomach. Every victim is different; every crime is different.

Mr McDonald: Talk about electioneering!

Mrs McMAHON: I have not mentioned it once! I am here to see an increase in support to victims. This bill apparently has partisan support—bipartisan support even—but that is not what I am hearing. I am hearing this bill being used as an excuse to trot out victims and stories. I have been a victim of crime. This term my house was broken into twice in the one week—once while I was home alone with my children. I will admit that as a result of my career of going to job after job, day after day speaking to victims of crime—up to five, six, seven times a day—I am desensitised to the effects of crime, even when I am the victim of a crime like a break and enter, but I do understand that every crime is different, every victim is different and every victim's response is different. There is not a one-size-fits-all response.

I understand that there are many stages of response—like the stages of grief—that a victim will go through. There will be disbelief, there will be denial, there will be anger and there will be someone they want to blame. That is absolutely understandable. That is human nature: I am angry, I did not do anything to be a victim of crime, but here I am. Let us be angry, let us point the finger at somebody and, yes, offenders deserve to be held accountable. That is the other side of this bill. There is work that we do to support victims. There is work that we do to hold perpetrators to account. They are not mutually exclusive. This House and the legislation we introduce can help every step of the way. The preventative measures that we implement in this space in relation to offenders are just as laudable as what we try to do to support victims.

I was on the road and operational when the VoCA Act was first introduced. In my last job in the vulnerable persons unit, we were responsible for liaising with Victim Assist Queensland. The introduction of the police referral program was to make sure that victims of crime were linked with appropriate support agencies. When that program first rolled out there was only a very small number of agencies. As this program has expanded and grown, and as it became a police procedural requirement to refer victims on to specific support agencies—and one of those includes Victim Assist Queensland—the number of victims accessing and applying for support has increased—and it should. It is there to be used. When I talk to victims who come in to my office to speak to me, most of them admit that they have never been told about Victim Assist Queensland.

I know it is part of police protocol that police must log a record of every job and what agency the victim has been referred to, but police are not counsellors. When they are dealing with victims it is a very transactional, procedural process. Police have many things on their mind when dealing with a victim. Not every copper is going to be an empathetic person. They have a particular focus when a crime has happened and that is establishing what has happened and where the perpetrator is. There is urgency, there are procedural questions and sometimes it can be quite abrupt and confronting and leave the victim without appropriate support at the time. The police officer is there to try to catch the offender and hold them to account. They are not a social worker. They are not a psychologist. They cannot do it all.

That is why we have these referral and support agencies. I understand it is police policy to refer victims on to support agencies, but that may not happen in every single case and not every victim is going to be happy with the interaction they have with police. It is the very nature of it. Victims in many instances are never going to be happy with an outcome. Some may be and some may not. Every victim is different. I support our first responders doing what they can. In the five to six months of training at the academy, a police officer is not going to be trained to be empathetic, to have the best communication skills in the world, but as long as they are trained to get the information they need to hold perpetrators to account, that is their side of the equation. It is what we do in providing support services through Victim Assist Queensland and all the referral agencies out there, that are usually specifically tailored to the victim, that is the other side of the equation. That is what we are talking about here today.

I get to speak to victims and survivors of sexual assault on a regular basis. They are some of the most vulnerable people. They carry a level of trauma with them. No two victims are the same. I know how hard it is for some of them to stand up and talk. Not one of them ever wants to be used as a tool.

Mrs Frecklington: Tell your police minister that.

Honourable members interjected.

Mrs McMAHON: I understand that there are points to be made about police funding or about jurisdictions, procedures, sentences, penalties and offences. I understand that the funding of the police, courts and so on is absolutely up for grabs because that is a political policy point. However, I had thought we could come in here and have a supportive debate about victims of crime as we had bipartisan support for this bill. I have heard so many good contributions on this bill from both sides of the House. However, I can tell the House that that goodwill and the need to do something for victims deserves to be more than just something that is tacked onto an election slogan. Let us go back through *Hansard*. I am happy to name all of the members who decided to use this debate and their speech about victims of crime to give a '24 election slogan. That is shameful.