




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (6.54 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. 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 was established under the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009 to: help victims of acts of violence to recover from the acts by giving them financial assistance; for primary victims, to give the victim amounts representing a symbolic expression by the state of the community's recognition of the injuries suffered by them; and to give related victims who have suffered distress amounts representing a symbolic expression by the state of the community's recognition for the distress suffered by them.

The committee's report states that reported instances of crime and the number of victims of crime have markedly increased in Queensland in recent years. This is something that members on this side of the chamber have raised in this House many times. Whilst members of the government like to deny there is a crime crisis in this state, the committee report states the opposite.

The Queensland Government Statistician's Office *Crime Report, Queensland, 2021-22* reported 64,540 victims of offences against the person, a 49.2 per cent increase in total recorded victims reported in 2020-21. Following amendment of the VoCA Act in 2017, which extended eligibility for financial assistance to all victims of domestic and family violence, the number of financial assistance applications related to this crime increased. In 2022-23, the number of applications by victims of domestic and family violence crime rose 87.8 per cent, from 2,309 applications in 2021-22 to 4,337 applications. It is a sad fact that domestic violence cases have risen across our society. No region is immune from this. In the electorate that I represent, Condamine, we have had some terribly tragic circumstances reported to our office. These people's lives have been turned upside down in a very short period of time and they are in dire need of immediate assistance. My electorate is no different to anybody else's electorate.

The VoCA Act establishes a financial assistance scheme allowing victims of crime to apply for financial assistance to cover expenses for goods and services that they require to help them recover from an act of violence. The VoCA Act sets out four types of victims for the purpose of financial assistance: the primary victim, a related victim, a parent secondary and a witness secondary. The department stated that the bill responds to calls for reform recommended by recent inquiries, increased financial pressures owing to inflation and no increases in payment amounts, except for funeral expenses, since the VoCA Act commenced in 2009.

In response to a question asked during the public briefing about the possibility of moving assistance payments to a regulation under the act, the department referred to the KPMG review and stated that that is one of the conversations that has been happening within the department and that

would likely be something considered as part of the KPMG review and any subsequent legislative amendments, purely because it makes sense to have the assistance limited in regulation. However, that piece of work is quite a way away. I am sure that will be something KPMG will consider. I note the committee has recommended that the minister clarify if this is indeed the minister's intent. 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 from an act of violence.