




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION (COMBATING COERCIVE CONTROL) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (4.05 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Domestic and Family Violence Protection (Combating Coercive Control) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As this House knows, I am very passionate about protecting our community's most vulnerable, the women and children who suffer at the hands of those close to them, those whom they trusted as family.

As a community, we have watched as dozens of women and too many children have lost their lives, killed by partners or ex-partners who cannot bear to lose control over their domestic realm. Fuelled by psychotic rage and inadequacies, they violently take out their frustrations on innocent women whom as a community we fail to protect. We know most of the men and women in blue who have had to attend these monstrous crimes are as appalled and saddened as we are. For those police, we must provide the tools, the legislative framework and then the training and education to ensure they can stop these monsters in their tracks.

We know many women suffer in silence in toxic relationships, aware that things are not right. They know the insidious, smothering tentacles of coercive control. They are not allowed to go out or make any phone calls without his knowledge and are completely reliant on him for money to feed and clothe children. Often their families, their parents and their friends know something is off. Their attempts to help are made all the more difficult by this controlling behaviour. This legislation seeks to provide law enforcement with the kit they need to stop this behaviour and perhaps save women from a murderous fate.

The bill was examined by the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, and I thank them for their work. The LNP members of the committee tabled a statement of reservation. I know they recognised the critical need for urgent reform to make women and children safe in Queensland. Like them, I agree this bill updates legislation in our justice system, but there may be unintended consequences if there is not careful attention.

Importantly, this is just the first step in a journey to make coercive control a standalone offence in the future, a move for which I have been calling for many years, as a summary offence. The bill refers to a pattern of behaviour to confirm that domestic violence includes behaviour that may occur over a period of time and takes into account the cumulative impact of threatening, coercive or abusive acts in the context of that relationship.

Many stakeholders raised the prospect of adequate support to allow some of these new offences to be prosecuted. For example, Legal Aid Queensland was concerned that the amendment of the Evidence Act 1977 to increase the class of protected witness who cannot be cross-examined by the defendant when they are not represented in court. This means a court can make an order for free legal assistance in this case, and we all know how stretched our legal aid and community legal centres are. As a result, a commitment from those opposite to provide adequate resourcing is welcomed, both

people and funding, to ensure the legislation can be enacted in the manner in which it is intended. This should also include the need to fund the Robina My Community Legal, a volunteer legal centre for domestic violence victims that has survived on money from sausage sizzles.

Time after time we have asked the Palaszczuk Labor government to fund this important community group so that they can extend legal support and advice to vulnerable people in the city's south. I meet with women affected by domestic and sexual violence all the time and with those dedicated organisations who support them, and I hear tragic tales of how they have been let down by this government. They are forced to scramble for donations and other funding avenues because, quite simply, they do not have the means to support these families as they seek to leave violent homes. Again I urge the government to put their money where their mouth is and stump up to support this most vital group on the Gold Coast.

I know the strain that our domestic and family violence services are under. There are too many people in distress and not enough housing, money or housing options for those who are trying to flee. There were also concerns from stakeholders about the change of language relating to the sexual offence terminology. While we support the modernisation of language, there are still concerns about the government's choice of replacement. Some were concerned that the words chosen were threatening and distressing to the very people who are trying to have their voices heard by making a complaint. We also know that the criminal justice system in this state is stretched beyond belief. From the thin blue line to the prosecutors and court staff, there are simply not enough people to ensure justice is upheld in Queensland.

Again, I urge those opposite to cough up. They must provide the money to ensure our police can arrest and charge these DV perpetrators, and that they can be prosecuted and jailed where appropriate. It is not good enough to have women and children living in fear for months and even years on end while they wait for their tormentors to face justice. The delays must end.

This government has had close to 400 recommendations to prevent domestic violence and improve responses since 2015. They have had time to do more than make announcements and walk away as they do so often. The Queensland Audit Office report *Keeping people safe from domestic and family violence*, released earlier this month, found that the government does not assess and evaluate these measures—confirmation that they care more about how things look than about the substance.

I urge the government to provide the means for the bill's impact to be scrutinised once it is enacted. There must be sufficient resourcing to ensure the reforms are monitored early to identify any of these possible issues and to report back to ensure there can be changes if required. We must know that these measures are working in the way they are intended to protect our women and children. As I have said before, we must do all that we can to give domestic violence victims the framework they need as they seek to stand up for themselves—that applies to the police, as well. They must have the support to help these families. They must have the training and education to recognise, report and act on these insidious crimes.

The shame is that it has taken this Attorney-General so long to act on recommendations from the *Not now, not ever* report that was tabled seven years ago. The LNP has continually championed the need to introduce a new summary offence of domestic violence to make it really clear to both perpetrators and police that this is a crime—not hidden away in other statutes but a single offence. This offence would include coercive controlling behaviours, elder abuse and financial abuse.

Along with the police we know that there is a need for a domestic violence one-stop support network. We must make it easier for those fleeing violent homes. They must not be condemned to return because they cannot find the help they so desperately need. Those opposite must bear the responsibility for the ongoing suffering those families have felt as they have seen report after report and inquiry after inquiry hand down findings that they already know. Like me, they live with it. The control and intimidation is just one of the manifestations of domestic and family violence that the LNP has been trying to have recognised and dealt with for more than seven years.

Women and families should be able to access the records of previous offending against intimate partners so that they have a chance to escape. I have said the names of these women in this place before, and I will put them on record again. These are the women of the Gold Coast who make up a tragic list; a roll call of shame to those opposite. Tara Brown, bludgeoned to death. Teresa Bradford, stabbed by her husband. Larissa Beilby, bashed to death. Shelsea Schilling, suffocated. Melinda Horner, murdered. Karina Lock, gunned down. Fabiana Palhares, bludgeoned to death. Kym Cobby, in my own electorate, strangled to death.

I urge the government to adopt our policies, to make Tara's law a reality and to enable the disclosure of previous offending to intimate partners and families—that is what the parents of Tara Brown want.

Seven years ago, I told my story in this place. I was the middle daughter in a family of three living under the shadow of violence—sworn to secrecy, making up stories to explain the bruises and hiding the carving knife. I have cried with mothers who have lost their daughters; who knew that their partners were violent but had no way to stop them. I have marched with families saying 'enough is enough' and I have lit candles for those who were taken from us too soon. I know the lifelong impact family violence has; the memories and experiences that no child should have to bear or witness. That is why we, as lawmakers, must stand up for those who cannot.