Speech By

Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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

Mr O'CONNOR (Bonney—LNP) (3.04 pm): Across the road from my office in Labrador on the edge of a beautiful, green open space of one of the largest parks in our area is a small garden with a statue in the middle of it. When you first look at it, it is quite abstract. It is a strange curved shape, but after a few seconds what it is becomes clearer. The statue is of a woman hunched over, her head resting in her hands. When you look at it further, it seems as though she is crying and it would not be too far of a stretch to think she is even recoiling from or trying to protect herself from the blow of a partner. It is a tragic and beautiful memorial dedicated on behalf of my community to the victims and survivors of domestic violence. The plaque at the bottom reads 'Victims by chance, survivors by choice', and that is what we are here to take action on today.

This Labrador memorial is where the Gold Coast red rose rallies are held every time a woman from our city is killed in a domestic violence incident. I have been to many of them—far too many of them—along with our shadow minister and member for Whitsunday, the member for Mudgeeraba and my other Gold Coast colleague, the member for Currumbin. Tragically, she was there just a couple of weeks ago for a woman from her community who passed away. It is my sincere hope that none of us will ever have to cross that road to pay our respects to another woman killed at the hands of a partner or former partner.

Like so many of the stories we have heard from across our state in this debate, my community has also been shattered by horrific incidents of domestic abuse. Kelly Wilkinson, an Arundel State School mum, was allegedly murdered almost two years ago by being repeatedly stabbed and set on fire. It is just unspeakable what allegedly happened to her in a quiet suburban cul-de-sac. From our local police who were first on the scene, to Kelly's neighbours who will never forget what they saw, and especially the mums at Arundel—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Martin): Member for Bonney, can you just assure me that this matter is not currently before the courts?

Mr O'CONNOR: I used the term 'allegedly'.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I just remind you about the rules of sub judice. Using the word 'allegedly' does not meet the test.

Mr O'CONNOR: I will move on to the community impact. Those people will never forget, especially the mums at Arundel State School, including those who used to walk to school with Kelly and her kids. The reverberations were felt among the entire school community and by many other locals. Hundreds of people turned out to honour and remember Kelly at a candlelight vigil on the Gold Coast Titans training oval in Parkwood to show her family that they were not alone in their grief. It was incredibly moving, and I will never forget hearing the cover of *Supermarket Flowers* by Ed Sheeran—Kelly's favourite song—echoing out at sunset not even 500 metres from where she lived, with its chorus of 'Hallelujah, you were an angel in the shape of my mum'.

Every incident we see is tragic and our Gold Coast community has some of the worst statistics of any part of our state. The Southport court regularly has almost 3,000 applications for domestic violence orders every year, with consistently nearly 2,000 charges lodged for contravening a DVO. That is why the amendments from the *Hear her voice* report that this bill contains are really important. This legislation will enact recommendations 52 to 60 and 63 to 66 of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce. It will modernise and update the terminology around sexual offence, and I thank the many people who have advocated for this change. It is also good to see comprehensive additional conduct being captured by the offence of unlawful stalking, particularly in relation to: updating the laws to do with the technology that is so easily accessible; contacting a person; monitoring, tracking or surveillance; publishing offensive material; giving offensive material; and threatening, humiliating or abusive acts, known as doxxing.

Other important changes included in this are around the sexual assault counselling privilege framework, the Evidence Act, the Oaths Act, Telecommunications Interception Act and with jury directions. These are foundational steps to help our justice system better protect vulnerable Queenslanders with how they deal with domestic and family violence. This should provide the pathway to criminalise coercive control.

One thing I did want to raise was the Queensland Audit Office report, *Keeping people safe from domestic and family violence*, which generally highlighted the lack of assessment and evaluation of measures the government is taking. That means that they have little idea about what is working and what further resources are needed, and where those resources should be targeted. That is really important with nearly 400 recommendations handed to the government since 2015. It is so vital to follow those up.

The comment in that report about the Respect program in our schools which really stuck with me was that—

The department does not know the use, detail, or outcomes of Respect education in Queensland state schools. As a result, it cannot demonstrate that the Respect program has been effective or is a useful resource.

That is probably one of the biggest issues that is raised with me by my students that I have at Coombabah State High School and Southport State High School. It is really important to get that right, to make sure we are preventing this before it even becomes an issue from those really early and formative years. I know it has been reviewed, and I sincerely hope that it is improved upon as a priority for government.

To wrap up, we support the bill, we support the recommendations from the task force and we will continue to hold the government to account to make sure they implement it as quickly and thoroughly as possible.