




Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (12.52 pm): Today I want to give a voice to the victims of Labor's crime crisis in my community by sharing in this House some of the stories of the people who have got in touch with me. Ron told me, 'As an older person I no longer use public transport during times of high school student usage or at night.' Jenny said, 'I no longer go out after 5 pm. I lock myself in my house, which prevents me from enjoying the magnificent Gold Coast lifestyle.'

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr O'CONNOR: Geoff wrote, 'Enough is enough. Us older people are frightened to leave home. We are aged pensioners and do not go out at night because of youth crime.' Margaret told me, 'I have always felt very safe in Queensland and feel so sad that things have deteriorated to the extent that they have.'

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr O'CONNOR: Mr Deputy Speaker, can I get some support? I have a government minister interjecting while I am trying to read out victims'—

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Member for Pine Rivers, I do not need your assistance. You are warned under the standing orders. The member on his feet is not taking interjections. I will start warning members formally under the standing orders from this point on. I remind those who are on a warning that there is no further latitude and if they interject they will be asked to leave the chamber.

Mr O'CONNOR: Karen-Anne said—

Things must change. We were robbed last Christmas—actually Boxing Day morning—around 3 am. Christmas presents and jewellery were stolen, when we were all home. We had a large dog at that stage, but the dog was sick when we awoke, so we are guessing she had been given something as she didn't wake up during the robbery. Our insurance premiums and excess went up dramatically as a result.

Julian wrote—

Our brand new car was stolen overnight from our garage. The car was found and written off due to extensive damage incurred by three youths who were 13, 15 and 17. They got 6 months probation.

Greg wrote—

Our son works at night to pack shelves. His car was vandalised with both windscreens, roof jumped on, and metal pole smashed every panel. A shopping trolley was also used to inflict damage. We don't feel safe letting our teenage son work there anymore.

Finally, Janice shared her experience. She said—

I had my little Subaru Impreza stolen from my garage and it was burnt out on the Sunshine Coast Forest. I am an 81-year-old pensioner and had to use my savings to replace the vehicle as insurance only covered part of it and of course I had to pay the excess as it couldn't be recovered from the thieves. The teens were actually in my house whilst I was sleeping so I can think myself lucky I wasn't hurt, but it is a very scary thought as I live alone.

These are real people. This is not a media beat-up or a rent-a-crowd like Labor members have claimed. To Ron, Jenny, Geoff, Margaret, Karen-Anne, Julian, Janice and countless other people who have been victims of crime in my community, I want you to know that your voices are heard. There are many more examples because crime in my community is not isolated; it is happening right across Queensland.

There are two local victims of crime whom I must also mention, and that is, of course, Brett and Belinda Beasley. They have been through the unimaginable, and they devote their lives now to making sure no other family has to go through what they have. Everyone will know this story. Their son Jack was murdered in the middle of Surfers Paradise almost exactly four years ago, in December 2019, and they are driving change in his name. I am very proud to call Brett and Belinda my friends, and I am proud to serve on the board of the Jack Beasley Foundation alongside other local people. The JBF is all about driving the campaign against knife crime and youth violence. Our focus is on educating young people about the real-life consequences of carrying a knife when they leave home. We know that so many young people do it because they think they need it for their own protection, so they need to be told that it is not something they should be doing.

We also successfully pushed for laws to help police find weapons and take them off our streets. Just last week, alongside Brett and Belinda and the JBF, we had a walk-through with our local police for the first night of schoolies in Surfers Paradise to see Jack's Law, the expanded wandering operation, in action. We also went through with some of Jack's mates who were there with him in Surfers Paradise the night that he died. It was a very powerful thing to see them interact with some of those school leavers, telling them about what they experienced just a couple of streets away four years ago. In the first six months of Jack's Law over 2,900 handheld scanning operations have been conducted which have found over 350 weapons; 904 people have been charged with almost 1,600 offences. More than 31,000 people have been scanned in safe night precincts and on public transport.

The crime crisis that Queensland is experiencing is not the fault of our police. They do outstanding work with the resources they have. Most of my electorate—Arundel, Parkwood, Labrador and the northern part of Southport—is covered by the Southport Police Division. We have heard recent reports about how there are fewer staff there than we had over a decade ago, hovering somewhere around 100. I have heard stories about there being just a handful of them in the actual station at night, of officers barely being able to run the counter there to service locals. I would repeat my call for the Southport station to urgently have more police resources.

In terms of the bill before us, in June this year we called on the government to add a victim to the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. We were derided at the time, but now the government has seen some sense and taken this step, so once again the Liberal National Party is governing from opposition. This bill will: increase the membership of QSAC to no more than 14 members; enable the appointment of a person with lived experience as a victim of crime; add another person; and require that at least one member of QSAC must be a person with lived experience as a victim of crime. This is incredibly important, as the council must ensure there is sufficient representation of those impacted most by the crimes being committed, that being victims themselves. Like so many people in my electorate, victims have felt silenced by this government and that their needs are constantly being put behind the needs of offenders.

Mr Sullivan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Stafford will cease his interjections.

Mr O'CONNOR: Mr Deputy Speaker, I would have thought the member for Stafford would be more focused on his impending preselection battle than matters that happened over a decade ago, but that is okay. Well, that worked: I stopped getting interjections. That is fantastic. It is our hope that adding a victim of crime to the QSAC will be a step in the right direction towards correcting this message. All Queenslanders deserve to feel safe in their own homes and safe in their communities. Further, this bill will increase the upper limits for financial assistance payments.



Mr O'CONNOR (Bonney—LNP) (4.01 pm), continuing: This bill will: increase the upper limits for financial assistance payments and special assistance payments available to victims; increase the upper limits for payable funeral expenses and distress payments; and recategorise domestic violence as a category B act of violence for the purpose of special assistance payments. This increase is something I strongly support. From the outset, it is imperative that Victim Assist has the resources it needs to be able to deliver this effectively. From speaking to victims of crime in my community it is clear to me that, in many cases, they do not have the luxury of waiting. These people are struggling with the trauma of the crime committed against them and they deserve a government which takes responsibility.

I acknowledge Bravehearts, which is based in my electorate, at Arundel. They do an incredible job in child protection and in addressing some of the most horrific acts people perpetrate against children. They contributed to this inquiry with a submission in support of the bill. They noted that it implements recommendations from the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce and from the inquiry into the Queensland Police Service's response to domestic and family violence. They also noted that this will help with cost-of-living and service access issues. I do not think there will be time in my contribution to go into the DNA lab failings that the amendments will be addressing, but the acting shadow Attorney-General did an outstanding job laying out that timeline. I suspect that the member for Whitsunday, the shadow minister, will cover that in detail.

I conclude by saying this bill is a step in the right direction, but for victims of crime in my community the work is far from done. The only way to have genuine action to resolve the crime crisis gripping Queensland is to show Labor the door in '24.