




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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VICTIMS OF CRIME ASSISTANCE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (3.23 pm): Victims and victim-survivors have often been described as the forgotten people in the criminal justice system, and they say themselves they often are. In every inquiry I have been previously involved with their voices have been clear on our failings within the legal and justice system and their support for a needed victims' portal or group to access assistance for those impacted by non-fatal crimes such as home invasions and car theft. We heard how difficult it is that if your car is stolen you then cannot access that car, sometimes for many months. Victims have often said that they would like something similar to what is offered by organisations such as the Homicide Victims' Support Group, which does an incredible job. This situation is changing, as we have seen with this bill, and significant moves are being made within justice and support frameworks, and the government needs to be commended on this. We especially welcome—and I met him the other day—the Interim Victims' Commissioner, Jon Rouse. He is quite an amazing person. This paradigm shift towards focusing on victims and victim-survivors is important for multiple reasons, including to reduce crime, as many offenders themselves have been victims previously. Data has shown that 53 per cent of juvenile offenders come from domestic violence households, having been through much trauma in their formative years. A focus on victims, therefore, represents an opportunity for early intervention and prevention.

As we heard at the recent Victims of Crime Day, there is a common assumption in our culture that domestic violence ends when the victim leaves, which is often not the case. There are serious contributing factors that impact on a victim's decision to leave domestic violence and to not return. It can be dangerous, isolating and financially impossible, with confusion around access to assistance as well as the complexities and frustrations. Financial abuse extends to lack of access to cash or bank accounts and lack of housing options continue to be highlighted, including much needed emergency accommodations. Importantly, this bill recategorises domestic violence as a category B act of violence for the purpose of special assistance payments. These amendments better recognise the rising costs and serious and detrimental effect of domestic and family violence on victim-survivors and ensures they can receive increased financial assistance to support them in their recovery. A great many submitters fully supported these recommended changes to the bill.

The Victims of Crime Assistance Act, VoCAA, 2009 established in Queensland the financial assistance scheme intended to assist survivors recovering from acts of violence by providing financial assistance. There have been a number of recent separate inquiries into support provided recommending an increase in the level of support, and we have heard what that has been and it is quite substantial. The Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will increase the assistance provided in the VoCAA in terms of the total amount of financial assistance as well as the total amounts for specific types of assistance such as distress payments, funeral expenses and special assistance payments, as I mentioned. The benefits of these increased payments go beyond their monetary value; they represent a recognition of the significant impact of crime on victims. In addition,

the bill makes changes to the composition of Queensland's Sentencing Advisory Council to increase the number of members to 14 to enable the appointment of a person with lived experience as a victim of crime to sit on this body. This is very welcomed.

Future legislation must consider the many aspects of the criminal justice system; the complex social and economic inequalities and factors that contribute to crime; the rehabilitation supports and transitions, including accommodations, in efforts to reduce reoffending; as well as the mental health factors. In addition, it cannot be said loudly enough: we need earlier interventions. Having called now for four years to include in our curriculum a whole-of-school-life program commencing in preschool that incorporates wellbeing, respectful behaviours and self-management, this is needed more than ever to assess and monitor our young Queenslanders. This is to ensure the appropriate supports to both child and family are provided as part of that early intervention and prevention. We cannot keep doing the same expecting a different result. Increased financial assistance is an appreciated start to reduce trauma. However, a key focus must be to reduce the number of victims. As we continue untangling generational contributors to violent crimes, gaps in our justice system and the timing and resources for preventions, interventions and detentions, we must keep front and foremost community safety as well as stating the facts. As we have heard in recent public hearings, efforts that are placed based and community led are essential. It takes a village.

In closing, I thank the minister and the department, the Community Support and Services Committee and its secretariat, all submitters and those who attended hearings. I give a special mention to all we meet with daily such as the incredibly brave victims and victim-survivors and their families, the fabulous support organisations such as the Homicide Victims' Support Group, our agencies and our police. I also thank those individual Queenslanders who volunteer their time to assist victims, whether driving to and from court or sitting through and supporting victims at hearings that often go over many months or providing a much needed shoulder through the many long years of trauma victims experience. I commend the bill to the House.