




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (12.26 pm): At the outset, I want to acknowledge the work of many organisations and stakeholders around Queensland and in the Burnett and Bundaberg areas involved and working in this very difficult environment of domestic violence. I echo the calls from other members who have done a shout-out. It is amazing what they are doing.

The committee had to grapple with the question of what is coercive control. Coercive control was described in a submission to the committee by the Small Steps 4 Hannah Foundation as a set of behaviours used strategically by a perpetrator to create a one-sided power dynamic in an intimate relationship which allows them to exercise significant control over another person. While this can be accomplished by physical violence—which can contribute to an atmosphere of intimidation—it is more likely to be psychological behaviour that forces an individual to bend to the other's will. Sometimes this submission may be out of fear or of wanting to avoid a confrontation or simply because the victim is no longer able to continue fighting.

The amendments brought forward in this bill as a result of the *Hear her voice* recommendations are a necessary early step to improve the justice system's response to domestic and family violence. However, some of the measures will need to be monitored closely. As we know, these things will have to evolve. The rate at which we see women and children die or suffer at the hands of domestic, family and sexual violence is far too high, and we are not seeing enough progress to keep them safe.

It is important to acknowledge the submissions from stakeholders who were supportive of the intent of the bill. However, there was some feedback on several of the provisions and potential unintended consequences from their introduction. Since 2015 there have been close to 400 recommendations handed to the government to improve responses in the community. One submission I want to highlight was from the Police Union. I know the minister is in the House and addressed this the other day. The Police Union raised concerns that the Queensland Police Service did not appear before the committee or make a submission to the inquiry. Questions were raised about the tight timeframes of the legislation and whether that had an impact on the community and stakeholders having enough time to view, digest and consider the complexities of the legislation.

Because of the significant impact on the Queensland Police, it is important that the Queensland Police Union's primary concerns with the legislation be recognised and the issues of resourcing and lack of funding be corrected. The Queensland Police have a fixed budget from which to draw resourcing to implement the legislation and meet the expectations of the bill. The concern is that this legislation expands the body of work that must be undertaken by police and does not provide any additional resourcing to aid police in the administration and policing of the changes. Again, I acknowledge the minister's contribution yesterday assuring us that that will be corrected.

The explanatory notes state—

The Bill is likely to increase demand for courts, police and the legal profession due to the increase in the number of matters coming before the courts, as well as an increase in the complexity of matters being heard. This demand will be monitored and any costs impacts will be assessed and included in future budget processes.

The Police Union is concerned that this legislation has not appropriately quantified what the additional cost and human resourcing requirements will be under the legislation.

The Queensland Police Union's submission was very enlightening because they provide an estimated average of 10,000 cases per year which will generate a minimum of an additional 880,000 police hours—11 police officer days per file. The average police officer who does not take any breaks or sick leave will work an average of 215 shifts a year. The calculations indicate that to service these new laws and do an appropriate investigation we need to see an additional 500 extra police, noting that these police officers cannot be fresh out of the academy and must be well-trained investigators.

I will use an example from the submission of the Small Steps 4 Hannah Foundation. Under 'Response by the Police' the submission states—

We can't speak highly enough of the effort of the Police to support Hannah. The office who took the initial complaint regularly stopped by to check on Hannah when she was at work, and we feel they provided her as much support as they were able to within the law as it currently stands. However, we also felt Police were hampered by both their workload and the lack of legislation to outlaw coercive control.

...

It's for the dedicated Police who want to solve the problem that we would like to see these laws in place. They are fighting a constant battle to make the world a safer place, and it would be good to give them an extra tool to get the job done. We also believe that there will be a need for training and resourcing to help some police understand the elements of coercive control, and how perpetrators strategically stitch them together to create an element of fear and intimidation.

Community attitudes, more understanding and awareness of coercive control is changing. I also must admit to limited knowledge of the complexities of coercive control before we started this in-depth community work. I support the calls for a government funded advertising campaign to help people understand and recognise these control measures and to understand their rights and obligations under these new laws.

I want to ensure that the work of the Small Steps 4 Hannah Foundation and the recent partnership with the Lady Musgrave Trust to launch a television advertising campaign about the red flags of coercive control gets acknowledged and encouraged to expand and to provide online access to the handy guide for women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to domestic and family violence.

The Queensland Audit Office report from last year, *Keeping people safe from domestic and family violence*, found that the government does very little assessment and evaluation of their measures, meaning they often do not know what is working and what resources they need. I want to discuss some of the detailed findings that we need to address. I am sure everyone has had a look at these. On page 15 of the report it states—

The introduction of "choking, suffocation, or strangulation in a domestic setting" is now a specific offence in the criminal code. No entity has measured how effective it has been ...

With regard to police training, page 20 of the report states—

The QPS has increased its number of domestic and family violence coordinator and officer positions from 47 in 2020, to 77 in 2022. We expected that those police assigned to specialist DFV roles ... would be more highly trained and have a higher level of experience and expertise. This is not the case.

With regard to high-risk teams, the report states—

DJAG has not reviewed the placement of the high-risk teams since 2016.

...

In 2018-19, government spending on prevention measures accounted for only 4 per cent (\$7.1 million) of its overall expenditure on DFV initiatives.

In reference to the Respect program in schools, the report states—

The Respect program provides resources and teacher guidelines that schools use across the year levels. 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.

On rehab programs, the Audit Office report points out—

The Queensland Government does not collect data on attendance rates, completion rates, and waiting lists for perpetrator rehabilitation programs ...

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge the intent and work that has gone into the legislation and remind members that all of us have a role to play in being more responsive to the hundreds of informed recommendations provided to support the work of keeping families, women and children safe.

I want to give a shout-out to some stakeholder groups which overnight pointed out that the current forms available to do domestic violence assessments need to include a section on coercive control. Currently they do not. The forms currently reference physical abuse only. A section on coercive control needs to be added with questions like: did the perpetrator stalk the victim? Does the perpetrator control the finances? Does the perpetrator take control over aspects such as where you can go, where you can sleep, who you can see, what you can wear et cetera? These all need to be included in the victims of crime assistance forms, which have not been updated since last year, and the special primary victim report, which is a very important tool that is used across Queensland. I encourage the people in charge to update the forms so those women, children and others who are looking for assistance can access it as soon as possible.