




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Record of Proceedings, 30 April 2024

VICTIMS' COMMISSIONER AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE REVIEW BOARD BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (12.54 pm): I am pleased to rise and speak in support of the Victims' Commissioner and Sexual Violence Review Board Bill. The Queensland government is committed to supporting victims of crime throughout their recovery and in their fight for justice. The Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce in its second report titled *Hear her voice—report 2: Women and girls' experiences across the criminal justice system* recommended establishing a permanent Victims' Commissioner to promote the rights of victims. It also recommended establishing a Sexual Violence Review Board which will identify systemic issues in relation to the reporting, investigation and prosecution of sexual offences. These two initiatives were also supported by the Independent Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police Service responses to domestic and family violence and the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee's inquiry into the support provided to the victims of crime.

Far too often, women and girls are the targets and victims of crime, whether in domestic settings or in public. There have been 27 women around the nation killed by a current or former partner just since the start of this year alone. Over the weekend thousands of victim-survivors and their supporters came out to rally against domestic, family and sexual violence and demanded governments do more to prevent violence against women. Our government will not ignore these calls. We are committed to doing everything we can to stop the scourge of gendered violence, and this is why we have recently boosted funding for the domestic, family and sexual violence sector by \$36 million. This brings our total funding for these services to nearly \$214 million for 2024-25. I really do want to give a shout-out to our local domestic and family violence frontline workers. They are absolutely exceptional people who I know are over the moon about this funding boost.

Recent episodes of violence against women demonstrate that women are vulnerable in not only their own homes but also public spaces. The brutal stabbing murder of Vyleen White in Ipswich at Redbank Plains Shopping Centre was a senseless, tragic, violent crime that was traumatic for the whole community. The five women who were stabbed and killed and the eight women who were injured at the Westfield Bondi Junction shopping centre earlier this month was yet another tragedy that shocked the nation. Women were clearly targeted in both instances because they were seen as vulnerable, easy targets for their male attackers or for some other dark reasons.

For women to be truly free, we must be safe everywhere—in the home, in public spaces and in the workplace. Importantly, anyone who survives a violent crime must also feel safe and supported in our criminal justice system. The experience of the court system can be disempowering and traumatic and deter many from reporting crimes. There have been growing calls for improving support for victims of crime and recognising their rights in the court system. Too many victims of crime or domestic, family and sexual violence have told us that their experience of the criminal justice system leaves them feeling disempowered, retraumatised and invisible.

As the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce noted in their report, victims are integral players in criminal justice, rather than mere bystanders. The Victims' Commissioner builds on a body of reforms the Queensland government has implemented already to bolster support for victims, including creating

a Charter of Victims' Rights in 2009 and establishing Victim Assist Queensland. We have also increased the amount of financial assistance available to victims, particularly victims of domestic and family violence, to help them get their lives back on track.

We are committed to ensuring that justice should not be something that serves only the privileged few. Quite often it is the most vulnerable and marginalised members of our society who find themselves the victims of crime, but we know that crime is something that can happen to anyone. While the recommendation to establish a permanent Victims' Commissioner came out of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, the Victims' Commissioner's functions will apply for all people who suffer harm because of a criminal offence or because of domestic violence committed against them. Those victims include family members of a person who died because of a criminal offence committed against them and persons who witnessed or intervened in events and suffered harm as a result.

The Queensland government takes the safety of Queenslanders seriously and that is why today we announced the Community Safety Plan. It is an investment of \$1.2 billion that will keep Queenslanders safe and reduce crime. We are going to deliver 900 new police personnel and new police helicopters in Townsville, the Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay. We are expanding our successful youth co-responder program, one of which is already operating successfully in Ipswich. It is turning young lives around.

I do not want to discount the problem of youth crime that we are currently facing, but I do want to say that the actual rate of youth offending during Campbell Newman's time was higher than it is now. Youth offender rates have continued to fall since Labor came to government in 2019. We know there is more to do and we have listened to the victims of crime and their loved ones who have told us that Queensland's criminal justice system is not meeting their needs. I want to thank all of those community advocates and victim-survivors who have had the courage to tell their stories and demand action for change. I commend this bill to the House.