




Speech By  
**Hon. Shannon Fentiman**

**MEMBER FOR WATERFORD**

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Record of Proceedings, 30 April 2024

## **VICTIMS' COMMISSIONER AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE REVIEW BOARD BILL**

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women) (12.28 pm): I am so proud to rise in support of this bill. In responding to the contribution of the member for Scenic Rim, I cannot believe that the member for Scenic Rim is saying that we are not listening to the voices of victims. This very bill is as a result of a recommendation from the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce that heard from over hundreds and hundreds of women with lived experience—victims of crime.

We are here today debating a bill to establish a Victims' Commissioner. I am so proud that we have listened to those victims' voices and that those women with lived experience are now being put front and centre in our criminal justice system. I would urge the opposition to stop playing politics with a bill like this.

In supporting this bill, we are actually delivering on two key initiatives recommended by the historic Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce. The taskforce frequently heard that victim-survivors felt disempowered by the criminal justice system and that they felt nobody was fighting for their interests. One victim bravely told the taskforce—

Victims are left in the dark in this system, we are not given enough information—perhaps they forget most of us have never had to interact with this system before, we don't know how it works.

This can deter victims from reporting crimes and pursuing justice and leave perpetrators emboldened to reoffend. This is why it is so critical to establish a permanent Victims' Commissioner who is tasked with representing victims' interests, one who will find out and root out systemic issues to help create a better criminal justice system for victims—a compassionate, trauma informed criminal justice system that puts victims' experiences at its centre.

The right of victims to be treated with compassion, respect and dignity and the right to particular information whilst a matter progresses is enshrined in the Queensland Charter of Victims' Rights, and the Victims' Commissioner will provide oversight of complaints made about compliance with the charter in a transparent and accountable way. The development of this role has been informed by consultation with victim-survivors, their families and the stakeholders who support them.

I had the pleasure of hosting the UK's former victims' commissioner, the Hon. Dame Vera Baird KC, here at parliament not that long ago, and she generously provided her insight and expertise on the development of the commissioner role here in Queensland. I want to thank her and all of the other stakeholders who contributed to the development of the Victim's Commissioner.

Importantly, this bill also establishes the Sexual Violence Review Board. The taskforce found that only 13 per cent of sexual assaults are reported to the police. Victim-survivors, sexual assault support services and legal professionals repeatedly spoke of victims not being believed and feeling judged, dismissed, blamed and powerless. They spoke of the impact of the myths and misconceptions about

rape and sexual assault that influence the credibility and believability of victims. Our criminal justice system must be more responsive to victims, but to do that we need to understand why the criminal justice system is failing victims and drive meaningful reform.

The main function of the Sexual Violence Review Board will be to identify and review systemic issues in relation to the reporting, investigation and prosecution of sexual offences here in Queensland. Chaired by the Victims' Commissioner, the board will include representatives from police, prosecution, forensic services and courts. Importantly, the board will include four community members appointed for their lived experience, professional expertise in sexual violence or expertise in support services provided to victims. The board will make and monitor the implementation of recommendations about necessary improvements.

Our government is committed to ending all forms of violence against women. We have criminalised coercive control, we have introduced affirmative consent and we have made stealthing a crime. Our amendments to the legislation are working to address the myths and misconceptions that persist in our criminal justice system. They are better aligned with modern community expectations and the voices and experiences of victim-survivors. Those experiences matter, and yesterday we announced that sexual assault services will receive a 20 per cent increase in their funding. We are also improving the responses of police, our health workers, our prosecutors and our courts. We are doing all of this because we are listening to victims. To them I say this: we hear you, we believe you, we thank you, and now we are taking action. I commend the bill to the House.