




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR JORDAN

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**COMMUNITY PROTECTION AND PUBLIC CHILD SEX OFFENDER REGISTER
(DANIEL'S LAW) BILL**

 **Ms MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (6.11 pm): I rise to contribute to the Community Protection and Public Child Sex Offender Register (Daniel's Law) Bill 2025. I begin, as many others have, by acknowledging the Morcombe family. Bruce and Denise Morcombe are truly remarkable people. I am not sure there are many people in this world who could have survived the ordeal of losing a beloved child at the tender age of 13. Not many people in this world would have had the courage and determination to not only keep going—one step ahead of another—but to also make it their life's mission to protect all children through the work of the Daniel Morcombe Foundation, a foundation which began as a mission to find Daniel and which today is a powerful force for educating children, supporting young victims of crime and helping families of missing persons. Day for Daniel this Friday has grown to become Australia's largest child safety education and awareness event, with over two million participants. I know many schools in my own community support Day for Daniel and whilst, of course, it honours the memory of Daniel Morcombe, it also reinforces the vital message that keeping kids safe is a responsibility we all share—parents, carers, educators, businesses, the entire community.

On this side of the House we will support key measures which keep children safe and the Queensland Labor opposition will be supporting the legislation before us today. The bill proposes amendments to the act to establish a three-tier Community Protection and Public Child Sex Offender Register with the aim of protecting Queensland children. It is intended that the public register will operate via the Queensland Community Protection and Public Child Sex Offender Register website and it will be administered by the Queensland Police Service.

Tier 1 will be a public website, displaying facial images and personal details of reportable offenders who have breached their obligations and whose whereabouts are unknown to police. Tier 2 is a local area search that will allow Queensland residents to apply to temporarily view facial images of particular reportable offenders, including reportable offenders who the Police Commissioner considers pose a serious risk to the lives or sexual safety of a child or children residing in the general locality. Tier 3 is a parent or guardian disclosure scheme that by application will enable parents, or those with ongoing parental responsibility for a child, to confirm whether a particular person who has had or will have unsupervised contact with their child, is a reportable offender.

As the committee report outlines, the aim of this three-tier public register is to act as a proactive tool for parents, guardians and the community. It is meant to provide them with the information and agency necessary to take actions that reduce risk and better protect Queensland children. As outlined in the committee's examination of the proposed register, there were, however, concerns raised by a number of submitters and stakeholders regarding the false sense of security that may result for parents and guardians of children who access the scheme. The National Office for Child Safety highlights research which indicates that most child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone known to the victim or survivor. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study released in 2023 highlighted that the two most common adult perpetrators of child sexual abuse are offenders who are known to victims or survivors,

specifically: parents or caregivers at home at 7.8 per cent; other known adults at 7.5 per cent. The prevalence of child sexual abuse perpetrated by unknown adults was 4.9 per cent. As was noted by Carol Ronken, Director of Research at Bravehearts—

I think the biggest limitation is the concern around the false sense of security that communities and families may feel. For example, we know that the majority of child sex offenders are people who are known, loved and trusted by the child and/or their family. There is still that myth out there that it is strangers we need to be aware of, and we know that is not the case. The reality is that most offenders are known and we need to be able to protect our children from everybody.

What was also made clear through the committee's examination is that the legislation will not capture all reportable child sex offenders and it does not capture all offenders in the community who are subject to the Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act. The QPS advised at the hearing that for tier 2, of the 3,240 reportable offenders on the child protection offender registry, less than 25 per cent would be captured under that tier of the register. It is imperative that the government is transparent and open about the scheme's limitations. To not do so would be highly irresponsible and indeed potentially dangerous if there is no clear guidance to parents and guardians that they cannot solely rely on this scheme to protect children.

Given the significance of this scheme, it is also important that it be well resourced and ready. It was deeply concerning through the committee process to see how underdeveloped the work on the register is—a concern raised by a number of stakeholders including the Crime and Corruption Commission. We were advised that limited staff—four or five—are working on the establishment of the register, with no clarity on how many staff will be needed in terms of the ongoing operation of the scheme. No ongoing funding has been provided to the Queensland Police Service for the operation of the register. There was limited funding of around \$10 million provided in this budget to build and establish the register. Given this government's rush to turn on critical IT systems that were clearly not ready just to save money, one would hope this funding will be sufficient for the register to work. We have seen no additional funding for staff resources in this year's budget nor allocated in the forward estimates.

There is also no funding for a public education campaign—something that so many submitters, including Bravehearts, Queensland Sexual Assault Network and the Morcombes themselves, raised as a critical part of the scheme. Bravehearts stressed the importance of community education, specifically in relation to the limitations of the public register, noting that it pertains to identified offenders only. In particular, Bravehearts emphasised that the public register and any supporting communication and education materials should be trauma-informed and developed in consultation with victim-survivors to limit retraumatisation.

The government has made the decision to bring this legislation forward. Clearly, they wish to pass it before the Day for Daniel on Friday, but to not allocate sufficient funding in the budget to operationalise the register and provide education on it is truly irresponsible and potentially dangerous. Whilst it is understood that this type of register would require upwards of 100 ongoing full-time-equivalent staff, none of this has been included in the implementation plan.

It was interesting to hear from the deputy commissioner that in addressing resourcing the QPS is looking at a level of automation which, of course, leads to more specific questions around whether AI will be used to operationalise the register and what specific safeguards will be in place to ensure automation does not lead to critical errors that could have serious repercussions, especially for victims.

Finally, I wish to address the issue of potential vigilante action resulting from the register. The potential misuse of information about offenders that could lead to a broad range of vigilante style conduct is a serious and real concern. I welcome the decision to include new and targeted offences in division 3 of the bill, including an offence carrying a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment targeting conduct intending to or inciting others to intimidate or harass another person they believe or suspect is an identified offender; an offence carrying a maximum penalty of three years imprisonment targeting conduct that is likely to or likely to incite others to intimidate or harass another person they believe or suspect is an identified offender; and an additional offence carrying a maximum penalty of three years imprisonment for the unauthorised sharing of information obtained through the public register. Again, this will require a significant public education campaign to ensure the public clearly understands there will be zero tolerance of vigilante action as a result of information that will be made publicly available through the register.

On this side of the House we are hopeful that the public sex offender register will make a difference in keeping children safe. Along with stakeholders, I believe we have raised legitimate concerns regarding whether the new scheme has the potential to create a false sense of security for the community given its limited application, the small amount of limited-life funding, no plan for an education campaign as yet and resourcing of the new register, which seems to have been an afterthought.

In concluding, I would like to once again acknowledge the significant work and advocacy of wonderful organisations such as the Daniel Morcombe Foundation and Bravehearts. Each and every day they are committed to ensuring we have a world where people, communities and systems all work together to protect children from sexual abuse. To quote the submission of Bravehearts, notification schemes should only be considered as part of an holistic approach to the protection of children and young people. Offender reporting laws and notification schemes only protect against known convicted sex offenders. Research indicates that only a small percentage of sexual offence cases make their way into the criminal justice system. We would emphasise the need for governments to invest in public awareness of safety and protective skills, specifically programs that build resilience and empower children with the knowledge to keep safe.