



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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**PENALTIES AND SENTENCES (SEXUAL OFFENCES) AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2025**

Second Reading

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (4.14 pm): I rise to address the Penalties and Sentences (Sexual Offences) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. This legislation represents an important step forward in strengthening Queensland's justice system and delivering on the Crisafulli Liberal National Party state government's commitment to make our community safer. Introduced into the Queensland parliament on 20 May 2025 by the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Integrity, the Hon. Deb Frecklington MP, this legislation was subsequently referred to the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee for detailed consideration and consultation. Through its examination, the committee received 197 submissions, in addition to holding a public hearing and public briefing, and I wish to acknowledge and thank all who contributed, especially victims of crime who shared their experiences. As we know, their voices matter and they certainly have been heard by this state government. What is more, Queenslanders can be assured that the Crisafulli LNP state government will continue to listen and will continue to act.

This legislation delivers on four significant recommendations from the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council's report *Sentencing of sexual assault and rape: the ripple effect*. That report, tabled in December 2024 and released publicly in February this year, highlighted the need for urgent reforms to ensure sentencing better reflects the seriousness of sexual assault and rape and the lifelong impact on victims. The Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council's report made 28 recommendations in total. This legislation implements the four legislative amendments, but certainly there is more work to do. The Attorney-General has already announced the next stage of reforms, including a holistic review of section 9 of the Penalties and Sentences Act, which sets out sentencing guidelines, and a comprehensive review of the victim impact statement regime. Importantly, these reviews will take place in consultation with victims, stakeholders and the community, and they will lead to further reforms.

The four reforms contained in this legislation are significant and they are landmark changes. Firstly, this legislation introduces a new statutory aggravating factor to make clear that sexual offending against children aged 16 or 17 will be treated with the utmost seriousness. Provisions already exist that recognise the special vulnerability of children under 16. However, the Queensland community rightly expects that offences against older children are also treated as aggravated. Sexual offending against children is one of the most heinous crimes, and this state government is making sure our laws reflect that reality.

Secondly, this legislation reforms the use of so-called good-character evidence at sentencing. For too long, offenders convicted of rape or sexual assault have been able to rely on testimonials about their community standing or personal reputation to argue for lighter sentences. Under reforms introduced by the Crisafulli LNP state government, such evidence will only be admissible where it is directly relevant to rehabilitation or risk of reoffending. Even then, courts will retain discretion as to

whether it should mitigate any sentence. Queensland is the first jurisdiction in the nation to implement this type of restriction. It is bold, it is overdue and it reflects the state government's unwavering focus on victims.

Thirdly, this legislation expands the purpose of sentencing to expressly include recognition of harm caused to victims. The harm from sexual offences can be lifelong, devastating and intergenerational. Under the former government victims were made to feel invisible, with their trauma disregarded in sentencing decisions. In contrast, the Crisafulli LNP state government is putting victims front and centre by ensuring our courts recognise the impact of these crimes when imposing sentences.

Finally, this legislation clarifies that the absence of a victim impact statement does not mean that a victim has not been harmed. Too often victims are retraumatised by the legal process and choose not to provide such statements. That is certainly their right and we respect that, but it should never lead to the false inference that they were not harmed. This reform respects victims' choices while ensuring that offenders do not benefit from a victim's silence.

Each of these reforms is measured, considered and properly framed. That stands in stark contrast with the Labor opposition's attempt earlier this year to rush through last-minute amendments. That attempt by Labor to push changes through the House under an urgency motion would have taken away the ability for Queenslanders to have their say on significant reforms. Worse still, their changes were poorly drafted, incomplete and, in some cases, fundamentally flawed. Take, for example, the Labor opposition's proposal on good-character evidence. Labor's amendment would have prevented courts from considering that a person's good standing in the community, which placed them in a position of trust, actually aggravated their offending. That is extraordinary.

Under Labor's model, a teacher, coach or community leader who abused their position to commit sexual offences could have escaped having that betrayal recognised in sentencing. Similarly, their proposed changes on recognising harm were limited to surviving victims, which would have meant that courts could not have acknowledged the harms caused to victims of unlawful killing, including those who suffered sexual assault immediately before their death. This would have been an appalling oversight and a direct insult to victims. The Crisafulli Liberal National Party state government, through its calm, considered and methodical approach with considered consultation, will not make such mistakes. We are ensuring these reforms are correct, robust and effective.

Before concluding my contribution, I want to acknowledge that, beyond the core reforms from the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council report, this legislation also strengthens protections in other important areas. This legislation will introduce a new offence of falsely representing a government agency. Queenslanders must be able to trust official communications. Anyone who impersonates a government for fraudulent or malicious purposes undermines public confidence and endangers the community. This new offence carries a maximum penalty of three years imprisonment, sending a clear signal that such conduct will not be tolerated. I note that this legislation also makes important amendments to the working with children framework, ensuring the blue card system is operating as intended. These amendments address drafting errors left by the former Labor state government, and they respond to the recommendations of the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

Child safety is paramount. Every Queenslander should have confidence that those working with our children are held to the highest possible standards. There is a stark contrast between the Crisafulli LNP state government and the former Labor state government. Labor govern for headlines. They tried to patch problems with rushed ill-considered legislation that did not stand up to scrutiny. They certainly ignored victims and put offenders first. The Crisafulli LNP state government is governing for all Queenslanders. We are delivering thoughtful, principled and victim focused reforms. We are rebuilding trust in our justice system and we are making Queensland safer. This legislation is another demonstration of our commitment to a fair and efficient justice system that prioritises victims and protects the community. Certainly, at the last state election, we gave a commitment to all of Queensland that we would restore community safety. It is about ensuring sentences reflect the gravity of sexual offending, it is about ensuring victims are not retraumatised by the process and it is about standing up for the values and expectations of Queenslanders.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging the courage of the victims who contributed to the development and consideration of these reforms and to those who continue to speak out and share their experiences so that others may be protected. Can I also acknowledge the parliamentary members of the committee on both sides of the House for the work that they undertook in relation to scrutinising the legislation and the work that they did in compiling the report, as well as the relevant committee secretariat because all of those processes are very important when we are looking at legislation and scrutinising it before it comes back to the House. I commend the bill to the House.