



Speech By
Donna Kirkland

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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

Second Reading

 **Mrs KIRKLAND** (Rockhampton—LNP) (5.16 pm): I rise today in full support of the Penalties and Sentences (Sexual Offences) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Over the last six years I have walked the streets of Rockhampton and surrounding regions. I have knocked on doors, made calls and listened deeply to the voices of our community. What I heard time and again was a growing unease—families no longer felt safe and individuals shared stories of fear, frustration and a sense that the system had stopped protecting them. This erosion of safety and justice against offenders did not happen overnight; it was the result of years of neglect and denial—

A government member: Ten years.

Mrs KIRKLAND: Ten years—particularly when the previous government weakened the youth justice laws. That decision triggered a wave of youth crime, emboldening the offenders and leaving victims without justice.

Mr McDonald: A generation of untouchables.

Mrs KIRKLAND: A generation of untouchables, indeed—I will take that interjection. The consequences were devastating and the community felt abandoned.

To those who have bravely shared their personal experiences through the committee submissions and community forums, I say thank you. Their courage has helped shape this bill and their voices have made it clear that our justice system needs reform. For too long it has tilted in favour of offenders, leaving victims sidelined and unheard. Alongside the great work already done by the Crisafulli government, this bill continues to correct that imbalance.

Presented in late December 2024 and then released to the public in February this year was the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council's report *Sentencing of sexual assault and rape: the ripple effect*. This report laid the groundwork. It offered 28 recommendations, four of which are now being enshrined in legislation. Firstly, courts must treat sexual offences against children as aggravating factors in sentencing. The culpability of such offences against our most vulnerable should never be overlooked. Secondly, sentencing must explicitly acknowledge the harm done to victims. Survivors of sexual abuse will never fully be free from the ripple effect of their experience, and this needs to be taken into account during sentencing. Thirdly, the use of good-character evidence must now be qualified, especially when that very character enabled the offending. Fourthly, courts must not assume minimal harm simply because a victim impact statement was not submitted. Not all those who have been violated, including our youngest of victims, have the capacity to submit impact statements. By assuming minimal harm, the courts only further add to their violation. These reforms are not just technical adjustments; they are moral imperatives and they reflect what our communities have been demanding for years.

I will now address the delays and the political posturing from those opposite. For 10 years the previous government had the opportunity to act, yet it was not until 2023 that they even acknowledged the need for change. When they finally did, their original proposed amendments were flawed. For instance, their version of the good-character clause would have prevented courts from considering how an offender's respected status in the community may have facilitated their crime. That is not justice; that is a loophole.

Another glaring issue was their narrow definition of victim harm. Their proposal only recognised harm to surviving victims, ignoring those who suffered abuse immediately before death. Their oversight was not just technical; it was a fundamental failure to honour the full scope of trauma. These missteps under the watch of the previous government are exactly why Queenslanders lost faith in their ability to protect them.

This bill, however, is different. It is trauma informed. It is victim focused. It is built on the understanding that justice must be both fair and compassionate. To achieve that, we put this bill out to the public for their scrutiny and input. To all members of the committee who oversaw the submissions and the heart-wrenching testimonies and presentations, I say thank you on behalf of the people of Queensland.

The remaining 24 recommendations from the QSAC report are being reviewed through a staged process. We are not rushing. We are getting it right. Under the leadership of the Crisafulli government, we have made real progress in just 10 months. We have introduced the Making Queensland Safer Laws. We are fixing the Queensland DNA laboratory debacle. We have made Jack's Law permanent. We have introduced Daniel's Law to improve visibility of child sex offenders. We have strengthened protections through the domestic and family violence protection bill. We have reformed parole through the corrective services amendment bill. We have advanced integrity with the crime and corruption bill. We have commenced the commission of inquiry into the flawed child safety system.

Each of these reforms reflect our unwavering commitment to community safety. As a mother and a grandmother, I feel this deeply. You do not need to be a parent to understand the importance of protecting our children. Every Queenslander expects that those who are entrusted with our children—teachers, carers and coaches—are all held to the highest standard. That is why we are here today. We are ensuring the reforms recommended by the Queensland Family and Child Commission's report *Keeping Queensland's children more than safe: review of the blue card system* are properly implemented. Our review of the blue card system is also a part of that promise.

This bill is not the end. It is a milestone. It is a signal to every victim that their voice matters. It is a message to every offender that justice will be served. It is a commitment to every Queenslander that their safety is indeed our priority. I commend this bill to the House.