




Speech By
Hon. Glenn Butcher

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

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

 **Hon. GJ BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (11.32 am): Today I rise on behalf of the Queensland Labor opposition to speak on the Community Protection and Public Child Sex Offender Register (Daniel's Law) Bill 2025, known by all as Daniel's Law. Knowing of the tragedy that inspired this legislation and the decades of advocacy that preceded it, I want to acknowledge Labor's support for the intent of this bill, but we are also mindful of the issues that have been raised and the importance of getting this reform right.

First and foremost, we commend Bruce and Denise Morcombe for their continued and tireless dedication in keeping children safe through the work of the Daniel Morcombe Foundation. The passage of Daniel's Law is a deeply meaningful and significant moment for the Morcombe family. Bruce and Denise embody bravery in the face of unimaginable grief. To have lost their child in such a horrific way and then to dedicate their whole lives to do whatever they can to keep children safe is such a testament to both of them. The work of the foundation has made a real difference and they have every right to be proud of it.

We note that this Friday is Day for Daniel—the largest child safety education and awareness day in Australia. Denise advised us during the public briefing that over two million people participate in Day for Daniel alone. This is an extraordinary achievement and without doubt has and will certainly continue to make children across the country safer. Importantly, the work of the foundation goes much further than the Day for Daniel alone through advocacy, education and awareness. To mark the 20th anniversary of the foundation this year, it released a 30-minute documentary *Don't Waste It*—a powerful tribute and educational resource designed to speak directly to teens aged 13 to 15 to help them to understand personal safety in real-world situations. It highlights the foundation's journey from the early years through to today where it is a national leader in the child protection space. I encourage anyone in this parliament who has not already watched it to do so.

In short, the Queensland Labor opposition notes with deep respect that the Morcombe family's advocacy has delivered so much and this bill today is a fitting recognition of that sustained endeavour for them. Let me make this very clear: the Queensland Labor opposition will always support laws that protect children in Queensland. We recognise that the intent of Daniel's Law is entirely consistent with that commitment. Children must be protected. If this parliament does nothing else, it must do just that—keep kids safe.

This bill aims to establish a child sex offender register in Queensland—a three-tier disclosure system—to give families and communities greater access to the information about those reportable offenders. The bill is broadly based on the Western Australian model which was established in 2012. Under the bill, tier 1 will feature a publicly available website displaying facial images and personal details of reportable offenders who have breached obligations and whose whereabouts are unknown to the police. Tier 2 provides for a local area search system. Queensland residents can apply to view images of certain reportable offenders residing in their general locality when the commissioner considers that

they pose a serious risk to the lives or sexual safety of children. Tier 3 is a parent or guardian disclosure scheme which is an application-based system enabling parents or people with ongoing parental responsibility to apply for confirmation about whether a particular person who has unsupervised contact with their child is a reportable offender.

We support the bill's aims, we support the recognition that families should have access to relevant information to help keep children safe and we support the honouring of Daniel's legacy here in Queensland, but we must also address the issues with this bill. While we support the intent, the opposition has significant concerns and calls on the Queensland Police Service and the government to ensure that the scheme is properly resourced, closely monitored and fit for purpose. The opposition calls on the Crisafulli government to properly resource the QPS for the ongoing operation of Daniel's Law, not just its establishment. In addition, we condemn the now Premier and the LNP for removing 1,700 child sex offenders from the register in 2014 when the LNP was last in government. That is its record, and it knows it.

Let me take members through the issues in some detail. During the committee process numerous stakeholders voiced concerns about the bill and what it would achieve and, importantly, what it would not achieve. One key concern is the potential for a false sense of security for parents and guardians. While a public register may provide additional information, it must be clearly communicated because, as an example, the bill will not capture all reportable child sex offenders and it will not capture all offenders in the community subject to the Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act 2003.

As noted in the public hearing, the QPS advised that, for tier 2, of the 3,240 reportable offenders on the child protection offender registry only 749 reportable offenders, including those subject to DP(SO)A, would be under tier 2 of the register—that is, less than 25 per cent of reportable offenders under tier 2. This means that the register is only one tool and not a blanket solution. Parents and guardians in Queensland need to be made aware of this gap so they do not rely solely on the register and inadvertently reduce their vigilance.

The Crime and Corruption Commission raised issues about the lack of empirical evidence supporting the protective impact of such registers and expressed concern about whether the QPS has adequate resources to manage a public register. The Queensland Law Society likewise flagged that they were not aware of empirical studies showing that making child sex offender details public better protects children in the community. The submission from Voice for Victims supported the bill but raised concerns about secondary trauma for victim-survivors, the potential public identification of victims and the possibility of false reassurance. They suggested mitigation strategies bolstering victim support services, opt-in notification protocols and community education campaigns.

In short, while the intent is laudable, the opposition is concerned that without proper safeguards, resourcing and communication there is a risk that the scheme could have unintended negative consequences. One of our most pressing concerns is resourcing. The Queensland Labor opposition places a spotlight on how the QPS will administer this new scheme. During the committee process, when the opposition asked how many sworn or unsworn staff will be needed to operationalise the register, the deputy commissioner responded—

We will initially have four or five staff to get it underway, but that is until we establish what is needed in terms of full-time equivalents going forward ...

That response certainly rings alarm bells, especially since no ongoing funding has been provided to the QPS by the LNP government for the operation of this register. The limited funding delivered in this year's budget only provides for the building and the establishment of the register itself. No additional permanent FTEs have been allocated in the budget and no additional funding has been allocated into the forward estimates. We cannot expect existing QPS staff to absorb this workload on top of their current duties. Our information indicates that the effective implementation of a register of this type could require upwards of 100 full-time-equivalent ongoing staff and cost up to \$17.5 million per year, depending on the mix of sworn and unsworn staff. Without this commitment, the system risks under-resourcing, backlogs and ineffective operation.

Moreover, while the deputy commissioner indicated that automation will play a role in reducing staff demands, this raises further questions. How will this automation interact with the commission's delegation powers? Will artificial intelligence or algorithmic decision-making be used? What safeguards will be in place to ensure errors are not introduced? How will privacy risks be managed? In addition, we note that resourcing was apparently used to justify the omission of a victim notification scheme. The deputy commissioner told the committee that the reason a victim notification scheme had not been pursued was 'the practicalities of actually contacting every victim' and that 'it is impractical to try to notify or contact previous victims before you release information'. We say that every victim matters. While we

acknowledge the practical challenges, the opposition believes that with adequate funding and planning many of these barriers can certainly be minimised. The committee was told that victims would get a fact sheet at the time an offender was initially charged, but that may have been years earlier and the fact sheet may not be front of mind. That is not good enough. Victims should not be blindsided as an unintended consequence of this scheme.

Another significant concern is the build and the implementation of the IT system to support the register. The system is being built from the ground up, which means there is no existing legacy system ready to be adapted. At the time of the committee briefing the QPS had not yet awarded a tender and had not even seen a proof of concept for the system being built. That leads to many questions. Are the laws being rushed through without adequate time to test the system? When will the system be built and fully operational? Will it be properly stress tested for security, privacy and load handling? Will parliament have to make further amendments based on technology issues that arise? Given that the legislation recognises the potential for unintended consequences—for example, misidentification, data breaches or the misuse of information—this delay and uncertainty are worrying. A system designed for legislation that the police themselves recognise may entail unintended consequences should not be rushed. It must be done in a methodical and considered way. We urge the government to commit to adequate timing, testing and transparency around tendering and system auditing.

The opposition strongly believes that ongoing monitoring is crucial. Due to the potential for unintended outcomes such as a false sense of security, vigilantism or misapplication of the register, this scheme needs robust oversight. The bill legislates a statutory review to be completed as soon as practical following five years of operation. Multiple stakeholders expressed concern that a five-year wait before a review happens is too long. The opposition implores the government to consider additional earlier and ongoing reviews—not just a five-year check-in. If issues arise earlier, they must be identified, addressed and rectified quickly. Experience from other jurisdictions such as the relatively recent scheme in South Australia should inform the monitoring so we avoid pitfalls. The scheme needs to be monitored to ensure it is working appropriately and the community is not experiencing negative consequences such as vigilantism or misuse.

As the committee heard, the scheme needs constant oversight. Education and awareness are definitely key. The opposition emphasises that the register is just one tool, not a silver-bullet solution. Numerous stakeholders during the committee process highlighted this point, and we encourage the government to take it seriously. Any community education campaign cannot be about LNP self-promotion, with three-word slogans and blue, glossy materials; it needs to be about substance. It needs to be about how the system works—about what it does and does not do. It needs to highlight, as stakeholders raised, that most offenders are not strangers; they are people close to the victim, people who may not be on the radar of authorities.

The public register will be one tool in the toolkit, but it must be part of a holistic approach to keeping children in Queensland safe. We urge the government to fund genuinely effective community education—reaching schools, parents, carers, community groups and sporting clubs and explaining the register to them. It must also explain the risks, the need for vigilance and the limitations and remind everyone to be alert, aware and informed. It is important that this parliament understands the context.

The Queensland Labor opposition acknowledges the work done over many years, including by previous Labor governments, to build strong protection laws for children. We introduced the strongest and toughest legislative framework in the nation for the monitoring of child sex offenders, doubling the monitoring period of child sex offenders subject to police monitoring. For example, the monitoring of first-time offenders went from five years to 10 years and repeat offenders from 10 years to 20 years or life. We permanently integrated Task Force Orion into the QPS Child Abuse and Sexual Crime Group. We significantly increased resources for the child protection offender register in 2015 and committed to further doubling them by 2030. We introduced new laws to expand police powers to enter the residence of a reportable offender to undertake digital device inspections. Labor introduced the requirement for reportable offenders to disclose the use of anonymising software, vault and black hole applications and their media access control addresses. Labor introduced a new offence, with penalties of up to five years imprisonment, for failing to comply with the requirement to produce a digital device for device inspection and required reportable offenders who had been convicted of failing to comply with their reporting obligation to report those details to police within seven days.

In contrast, the record of the LNP when they were last in government was to remove convicted child sex offenders from police monitoring overnight. In 2014 the LNP government, a government with the current Premier sitting at the cabinet table, changed the laws and removed the police oversight of 1,700 child sex offenders. That is the record of those opposite. The Queensland Labor opposition

condemns that decision and this House must not forget it. While we support the intent of Daniel's Law we also recognise that the realities of implementation and resource allocation are far more important than slogans and headlines.

In summary, the Queensland Labor opposition's position is this: we commend Bruce and Denise Morcombe on their ongoing, tireless dedication and we recognise the passage of Daniel's Law is a deeply meaningful and significant moment for the Morcombe family. We call on the Crisafulli government to properly resource QPS for the ongoing operation of Daniel's Law, not just its establishment. We will always support laws that protect Queensland children and we recognise the intent of Daniel's Law is aligned with that. We call on the LNP government to closely monitor the implementation of the laws to ensure that any unintended consequences are addressed quickly.

Let me highlight specific commitments we expect from government: budgetary commitment—not just a one-off establishment cost but funding built into the forward estimates to ensure ongoing staffing, training, systems maintenance, auditing, victim support and education campaigns; a transparent implementation plan, including tendering for IT systems, proof of concept, stress testing, user acceptance testing, privacy security audits, timelines for rollout and contingency plans in place; a community education campaign—substantive, well-funded, collaborative with the Morcombe foundation and other child safety stakeholders here in Queensland, explaining limitations of the register, the meaning of the tiers and reinforcing parent/carer vigilance; victim support provisions, including consideration of notification schemes and trauma informed supports addressing risk of secondary victimisation, ensuring that victims are informed and supported rather than blindsided.

We call on the government to monitor, evaluate and review—preferably an interim review period within approximately 18 to 24 months, then an ongoing evaluation framework leading to the statutory five-year review—to ensure any unintended consequences or technological operational issues are identified and rectified at the time. We expect communication about limitations: clear messaging that not all reportable offenders are captured, that the offender may be unknown to the register and that families cannot rely solely on the register as their only protective mechanism in Queensland.

Legislators in this House have a serious responsibility. The creation of Daniel's Law marks a major milestone for child safety in Queensland. It honours the memory of a young boy, it recognises the advocacy of a courageous family and gives parents a new tool to help protect their children. But a law is only as good as its implementation. The best intentions without resources, without monitoring, without transparency and without education can lead to gaps in the system, unintended harms or a false sense of security. We must not let that happen as part of this bill. The Queensland Labor opposition will be watching closely. We will participate constructively, we will hold government to account and we will support this bill because fundamentally protecting children is not negotiable. I commend the bill to the House with the caveats and requirements I have outlined and I trust the government will heed them. Thank you.