



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

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

Second Reading

 **Mrs POOLE** (Mundingburra—LNP) (3.57 pm): I rise in support of the Penalties and Sentences (Sexual Offences) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I take this opportunity to thank our Attorney-General and the chair of the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee, along with my colleagues the members for Capalaba and Thuringowa, for their hard work in putting this bill together.

This bill represents a clear step forward in restoring faith in our justice system, a key focus at the core of the Crisafulli government's commitment to our Queensland community. For too long victims of sexual offences were left feeling unheard and let down. Our government is determined to put victims back at the centre of that process and ensure that sentencing reflects both the seriousness of the crime and the harm caused.

I bring to this debate not only my role as the member for Mundingburra and the Assistant Minister for Community Safety but also my background of 28 years in the Queensland Police Service. I spent part of that career in the Juvenile Aid Bureau, now known as the Child Protection and Investigation Unit, investigating sexual offences against our young people. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our hardworking detectives in the child protection and investigation units throughout Queensland. To Detective Senior Sergeant Dave Miles of the Townsville district CPIU and all of his hardworking members in that unit, I say thank you for your dedication, your hard work and your support for our victim-survivors.

Those were some of the hardest cases I have ever worked on. I sat across from children and young people who should just be enjoying school, friends, art, sport and fashion, but instead they were recounting terrible experiences of betrayal and abuse. What struck me most was not just the immediate trauma but the long shadow that these crimes cast over their lives. For them, the sentence an offender received was never just a number; it was a signal of whether the system truly recognised their pain. This bill delivers reforms that go to that very issue.

One reform is about ensuring courts properly take into account the vulnerability of our older children—16- and 17-year-olds—when they are victims of sexual assault or rape. Up until now, the law made special provision only for children under 16. Our 16- and 17-year-olds may be approaching adulthood, but when they are victims of sexual offences the law must recognise their vulnerability. This change ensures the law reflects what we all know: that these offences are even more serious when committed against children, regardless of whether they are 12 or 17.

Another important reform deals with what is known as good-character evidence. Too often in the past, offenders have sought to lessen their punishment by pointing to community standing or glowing references. That has never sat well with victims who ask quite rightly how a good character can excuse

such terrible actions. Under this bill, such evidence can only be considered if it relates directly to rehabilitation or the risk of reoffending. In other words, the focus shifts from protecting the offender's reputation to protecting the community, and that is where the focus should be.

A further change is the explicit recognition of harm to victims in sentencing. Whilst this might sound technical, it is significant. Anyone who has sat with a victim, as I have many times, knows that the harm goes far beyond the physical. It affects confidence, relationships, careers and mental health, often for life. By making this recognition explicit, the law finally acknowledges what victims have always known: that the harm caused must be central to sentencing.

Finally, the bill makes it clear that, if a victim chooses not to provide a victim impact statement, the court cannot assume that means no harm was caused. That choice should always rest with the victim. Some will want their voices heard through a statement. Others may find it retraumatising or simply too difficult. Either way, the law should not and will not disadvantage them.

Together, these reforms make our sentencing framework stronger and fairer. They are about ensuring the punishment reflects not only the crime but also the impact on victims and the expectations of our community. This bill also contains important amendments beyond sentencing, including to the blue card system, which is correcting Labor's errors and ensuring the safety of our children. The bill contains stronger penalties for those impersonating government agencies, which is protecting Queenslanders from scams and misinformation, and it will align our crimes at sea legislation with national laws so that offenders cannot escape accountability.

This is not about headlines; it is about building a justice system that works for victims and not against them. It is about listening to the voices of our victim-survivors, many of whom have contributed to the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council's review and to the parliamentary committee's work on this bill. Their courage has driven these reforms, and I thank them sincerely.

When I think back to the young people I worked with in the Juvenile Aid Bureau, I can remember to this day their trauma, but I also remember their courage, their strength and their bravery. They deserved laws that recognised their suffering, that delivered justice and that sent a clear message to offenders. With this bill, we take an important step closer to that goal. I commend this bill to the House.