




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

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (7.45 pm): Daniel Morcombe's story is deeply personal to Queenslanders. His disappearance and the long years that followed left an indelible mark on our state. From that unimaginable pain, his parents, Bruce and Denise Morcombe, created a legacy of awareness, education and community protection, and I commend them for that. It is in that spirit that we consider Daniel's Law. This bill has one purpose: to make Queensland's children safer. I begin by acknowledging that every member of this House shares the goal. Regardless of party or position, we are united in our determination to do everything possible to protect Queensland's children from those who would harm them.

Labor has a proud record of taking tough and evidence-based action to protect children and to hold offenders to account. It was a Labor government that introduced the strongest legislative framework in the nation for monitoring child sex offenders—doubling reporting periods and extending oversight for repeat offenders to 20 years or life. Labor permanently integrated Taskforce Orion into the Queensland Police Service, targeting the online sexual exploitation of children. Since 2015 we have almost doubled the resources of the child protection offender register and had committed to doubling them again by 2030. We expanded police powers to inspect digital devices, introduced new offences for failing to comply with reporting obligations and cracked down on the use of anonymising software that offenders used to conceal their activities online. These are the kinds of strong and practical measures that keep Queenslanders safe. Daniel's Law builds on that work.

The bill creates a three-tier public register designed to give parents access to information about offenders living in their communities. It strengthens monitoring powers and introduces new offences for providing false information or attempting to manipulate the register. These are positive steps that increase transparency, empower families and send a clear message that the safety of children will always come first.

It is right that we recognise the Morcombe family for their extraordinary advocacy in helping bring this reform to life and the many Queenslanders who have supported them in those efforts. As we do this, we also have to remain clear-eyed about the scale of the problem we are trying to solve. National research tells us that more than one in four Australians have experienced child sexual abuse. Most were harmed by someone they knew—a family member, a neighbour, a coach or a trusted adult. They are not isolated cases. These represent an ongoing epidemic of harm that affects health, education, relationships and entire life trajectories. That is why no one single piece of legislation—no register or system—can ever be a complete solution.

This bill has to be implemented alongside strong public education, resourcing and prevention programs—the kind that help parents, carers and children to recognise grooming, to report abuse and to know where to turn for help. Every expert who submitted to the committee process made that point. The Family and Child Commissioner, the Public Guardian, the QFCC and all others emphasised that laws alone do not protect children; people do. It is why an education and awareness campaign has to

sit alongside this reform. It is what the Morcombe foundation has modelled for two decades through the Day for Daniel, empowering children and communities to identify unsafe behaviour and to speak up. If the register is to achieve its purpose, it has to be supported by those same principles: education, vigilance and trust.

There have been statements made today by members of the government that this bill will protect every child in Queensland. It is comments like these that concern me, comments that fail to recognise the complexity of the issue and fail to take responsibility for the education that is critical alongside this reform. Resourcing will also be critical. The bill introduces new tiers, notifications and reporting mechanisms. These must be matched with adequate funding, training and technology to ensure the register remains accurate, secure and effective.

The Deputy Commissioner advised the committee that only four or five staff will be assigned initially to get the program underway. That is grossly insufficient when stakeholders estimate that up to 100 full-time-equivalent staff could be required to administer this register. The minister needs to tell us today about the level of resourcing he is going to provide this critical register. We cannot afford to create a sense of safety that is not backed by strong systems and properly trained officers. Our police, our agencies and child protection workers are already stretched, and they deserve every resource necessary to implement these laws well.

We all want, of course, for this bill to succeed, and the Morcombes deserve the fullest attention by this government to the issue. It is not enough to issue a press release and move on. This reform will require a lot of resourcing, training and institutional reform within a number of departments and community education, and the minister and members opposite have been silent on that. So, while I welcome the bill and the intent behind it, we also have to be honest with Queenslanders about what this bill can and what it may not be able to do. A public register may help parents make informed decisions, but most abuse happens behind closed doors, often long before police or any system can intervene.

On a final note, I do have to, on behalf of victims of crime, express disappointment that it appears there is no intention from the government to notify victims when their offender is listed on this register. Queensland actually has obligations under the Victims of Crime Assistance Act where victims have explicit rights and expectations of how they should be treated by investigating and prosecuting agencies. One of those rights is the right to information—the right to know about the status of their case, including key events that occur after sentencing. It would be a really simple amendment for the government to oblige the Victims Register which is located within the Department of Corrections to simply contact victims and inform them ahead of the offender's name being made public. I simply cannot understand why the government would not be doing this because, as my colleagues have already said, every victim matters.

Daniel's Law is a step forward and it honours a young boy whose name has become synonymous with the protection of children in Queensland. It is a tribute to Denise and Bruce, to their tireless advocacy and to the thousands of Queenslanders who have said, 'Never again.' But it also reminds us that child protection is not achieved by legislation alone. It is achieved through culture—a culture of vigilance, care and shared responsibility. Labor has always believed that our duty as legislators is not just to respond to tragedy but to prevent it, which means continuing to resource our police, to strengthen our child protection systems and to educate our communities. I commend the bill to the House.