




Speech By
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**CRIME AND CORRUPTION (RESTORING REPORTING POWERS) AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (5.58 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Crime and Corruption (Restoring Reporting Powers) Amendment Bill that we are looking at and amending. This restores reporting powers. We have to ask ourselves: what does a government do? A government takes people's money and then spends it on their behalf. The question is: what should motivate members of the government to make decisions around that money? Obviously if there is corruption in that decision-making process, we should have an institution that is able to investigate that.

Another thing government does is it makes rules and regulations to control the lives of populations, hopefully for their benefit. Again, what happens if those rules and regulations are made in such a way that government is corrupt and they are not made in the best interests of those populations? We would want a body to be able to investigate that. Of course, it would be very important that, when that body investigates these things, it would be able to report back its findings in a suitable way, potentially through this House, so that the people of Queensland who elect us to serve and represent them can be assured that that service and representation is to them and not because of some ulterior interference, aka corruption.

Another thing government does is it establishes institutions. It sets up institutions to try to help administer the state and it appoints people to those institutions. One of those appointees was Mr Carne, who was appointed as the public trustee. There were a number of allegations made against the public trustee Peter Carne and those allegations included being regularly drunk at work. It is probably not an expectation of those people whom we tax and for whom we make rules to govern their lives that we would appoint somebody or allow somebody with such behaviour to continue. However, it went on much further than that: harassing office staff, keeping a breathalyser on his desk and misuse of the corporate credit card. Some would say the former government's treasurer might have been misusing the public purse by not being honest with everybody, but certainly misusing a corporate credit card is a serious breach of people's trust and the fact that it was a public trustee official—the public trustee—who was doing that was obviously very disappointing. There was also an allegation that he got his staff to write his university assignments. I would have thought in the days of ChatGPT that would not even be necessary, but here we are.

This surely shows someone with a lack of integrity, creating a culture where staff were fearful of speaking up. Then Mr Carne was boasting of his connections at the highest levels to the Labor government. That report was put together and it was ready to be shown to the people of Queensland, who paid for it, who had the institution set up on their behalf to ensure integrity in decisions of the people they elect to serve and represent them. What happened? The government of the day decided—I speculate because of those connections at the highest level of government, the Labor government, maybe because he was so well connected to the Labor Party leadership—not to release that report. However, the CCC wanted the report released so they pushed. Then it started to go through a legal process, and it is very important to have a legal process. The High Court was not looking at whether

the report should or should not be released. The High Court was looking at whether the legislation allows it to be released. It is not whether it is in the public interest or anything else but whether it should be allowed. The government of the day, with their mate and his connections at the highest level of the Labor government, then spent \$397,182 of taxpayers' money—that is the people whom we are elected to serve and represent—to keep secret the report that the corruption watchdog felt should be published because it highlighted the terrible misconduct of the then public trustee.

If there is an institution that is led by somebody like that who is behaving as the allegations were substantiated by the CCC and then the government spends nearly \$400,000 to try to keep that secret, people are going to rightly ask the question, 'Is there something in that report they don't want people to see?' Long story cut short, we ended up in a situation where we have taxed people, we have set up institutions, we have rules to govern their lives, we set up a corruption watchdog to make sure that is done in an ethical, a moral and a just way and then that institution is gagged. It has the gaffer tape put over its mouth. It is not allowed to tell people what it knows about what is going on in that institution when that watchdog is supposed to be governing their lives in a fair, equitable and just way.

That is the mess that the Attorney-General, the Crisafulli government Attorney-General, is trying to clear up here. It is to make sure that our corruption watchdog has the power—no matter who it is, no matter which institution—to both go and investigate that in an appropriate way and release that information. That is fundamentally important to the conduct of this democracy. What has gone on in here should not in any way be underestimated. It is disgraceful that the previous Labor government behaved this way and spent taxpayers' money to hide such a person's conduct from the public view. That destroys confidence in all of our institutions and it is not serving and representing the public of Queensland. That is why our Attorney-General is here fixing Labor's mess.

Before my time runs out, I want to talk about one of the amendments that is very important, particularly to one young woman in my electorate, and that is the one that relates to the DNA lab. This is a complete and utter debacle and a complete injustice. People have gone through a very difficult process of submitting DNA because they have been deeply wronged and they want somebody to do something about it. Because of the complete ineptitude of the former Labor government, that lab was not conducting itself appropriately and not providing the level of DNA analysis required for the evidence to be used to ensure people got justice for the crimes committed against them. These are the most heinous of crimes committed against them. I have had a constituent sitting down in front of me describing what happened and the injustice she felt based on the investigation of her DNA. It was disgraceful that the lab was conducted that way. It was disgraceful that the former government did not pick it up, did not fix it and did not manage it. It is even more disgraceful that, unless we bring forward these amendments, some of this evidence, because of the complete ineptitude and lack of funding to process all of these samples, will be destroyed and justice will never be served for those victims of these heinous crimes.

These amendments are fundamentally important to make sure that people who have been wronged in the most terrible ways have the opportunity—and the results so far show that nearly one in four, 23 per cent, will have that evidence come forward and be able to have justice served. That is why the amendments are urgent and that is why that evidence needs to be protected. That is why I support this bill, because I am here to serve and represent the people of Queensland and not some Labor apparatchik.