




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

Second Reading

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (8.48 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Community Protection and Public Child Sex Offender Register (Daniel's Law) Bill, better known as Daniel's Law. I rise to speak in strong support of this bill. In fact, this is long overdue reform that puts the safety of children ahead of the rights of sexual predators. It honours Daniel Morcombe—a son, a twin, a child, who should still be with us today, and it recognises the tireless advocacy of his parents, Bruce and Denise, who have channelled unimaginable grief into national change, education and empowerment. A promise made, a promise delivered.

This bill delivers on a key election commitment to introduce a three-tier public child sex offender register, giving parents and guardians the ability to know when a dangerous or missing offender is unaccounted for, to search their local area for high-risk reportable offenders and to check whether an individual who has unsupervised access to their child is a registered offender. This is practical, real-world protection. It empowers families, it increases vigilance and it helps prevent harm before it occurs.

The real shame here—and it is the Labor Party's shame—is that we could have had this legislation in place for over half a decade. This House debated this issue in 2019. I moved the LNP motion for exactly this public register—based on the same model, the same structure and the same principles that we are debating here today over half a decade later. At that time, those of us advocating for greater transparency said that parents have the right to know who is living near their children, that knowledge is power in preventing abuse and that protection of children must outweigh the privacy of offenders.

In 2019, when the current opposition were the Labor government of the day, they rejected that proposal outright. They called it 'populism' and a 'thought bubble'. They warned that it would 'give false hope' and 'not protect the community'. One of the former child safety ministers, the member for Bulimba, warned that the proposal may increase reoffending and give families false hope. If we skip forward to this debate, the member's contribution states that this is 'deeply meaningful and significant'. What hollow words when that is put into the context of the previous debate.

The member for Bulimba was also worried about the review time of this legislation in this debate. This legislation could have been in place for over half a decade and it could have been reviewed, but the fact is that the Labor Party had no interest in this bill at all and they now feign belief that it is a good idea. The Labor MPs say one thing and do another, but on our side of the House a promise made is a promise kept.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr WATTS: The members should feel disgrace.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Order! Members, it is getting close to the end of the night. We have had a fairly respectful debate so far. The member for Toowoomba North has the call and members will cease their interjections.

Mr WATTS: Back in 2019, another former failed child safety minister, the member for Nudgee, said, 'This policy does not afford our community extra protection.'

Ms Pease interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Lytton will cease her interjections.

Mr WATTS: The member for Nudgee has come into this House during this debate and said, 'Labor will always support laws that make children safer.' They say that now, but the facts show a different history. They come into this place with their hollow words—

Ms Pease interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I warn the member for Lytton under the standing orders. You will not be the last if that behaviour continues.

Mr WATTS: They have come into this place with hollow words now, saying that we should review the legislation sooner than five years when we have spent over half a decade not having this legislation in place in Queensland. Labor had a chance to make our children safer and they did not take it. Only the LNP will genuinely make our community safer. The member for Bancroft said, 'The LNP does not have a plan; it has a press release.' The member for Macalister labelled the proposal as reactionary and populist. The LNP is not listening to them. The LNP is listening to our community and our community expectations.

Ms Pease interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lytton, you have been here longer than I have. I trust that you understand that your interjections were inappropriate considering you had just been warned. I am tempted to name you for that performance. You will withdraw from the chamber for one hour under standing order 235A.

Whereupon the honourable member for Lytton withdrew from the chamber at 8.54 pm.

Mr WATTS: The Crisafulli LNP government will listen to the community and we will act on the community's behalf to make them and their children safer. Our side of the House will not let them down. We made a commitment that we would bring this legislation in, and we will do that and we are.

The community has always known the truth. When the risk is a child's life, knowing is always safer than not knowing. Knowing will make them safer. It is not a perfect solution. There will still be predators out there. There will still be people who do the wrong thing, but at least this gives a parent a fighting chance to know who lives around them, who is looking after their children, who has access to their children and what is their background. Parents deserve to know these things. Western Australia has shown this model can work and South Australia is moving in this direction. Queensland will not be left behind under a Crisafulli LNP government.

This is how the register will work. Tier 1 publishes the details of missing or noncompliant reportable offenders. If they follow the rules that have been set down, their picture will not be published. If they disappear and they do not report and they do not follow the instructions of the court after they have committed this heinous crime and been found guilty of it, their picture will be published and everybody will know who they are. That is fair enough. Anybody who thinks otherwise has got rocks in their head, and that really explains what is going on over on the other side of this chamber.

Tier 2 allows Queenslanders to see whether a high-risk offender lives in their suburb or adjoining environment. If you are sending your kids to the shop or they are out on their skateboard, riding their BMX or having a good time with their mates, it will be very useful to know if someone is living in and around your suburb or your location so you can take an additional precaution. This is common sense. It was common sense half a decade ago; it is still common sense today. Members on the other side have come in here now and said, 'It's a good idea now.' We do not believe them because they have proved historically that they do not think it is a good idea.

Tier 3 allows parents to check a specific person who has contact with their child. If your kid has a new dance teacher or a new footy coach and they have access to your child, you might think, 'It's better to be safe than sorry so I'll check this out.' It is not perfect. This will only be for a reportable offender. There may be someone out there who is a predator but is not on that list yet. Therefore, parents should still remain cautious but this gives them a much better chance.

Strong penalties are in place for someone who might use this because this is not about vigilantism or not giving offenders a chance to get on with their life after they have committed these heinous crimes. People should be aware that if they use this inappropriately they will face up to 10 years imprisonment. That is a pretty strong safeguard. That is sending a strong message that we trust our parents and the

people of Queensland to use this information to protect their children and not take action on their own. That is the job of the courts, the police and the government, and that is what the Labor government should have been doing to protect our children.

In my community in Toowoomba, this matters immensely. As in many communities, word travels informally through Facebook groups, parent chats, sporting clubs and school networks. I have received contact over the years from families raising concerns about who might be living in their community. There might be someone who is completely innocent but there is a whispering campaign going on about them in the background. Think about that poor person who has this whispering campaign against them in their community. In that case, people can go online to check and see, 'No, they're not a reportable offender. Let's move on.' That then ends all of that whispering campaign.

This register will deal in facts, not fear. It is there to help parents protect their children. It recognises that trust must be earned. If someone is a reportable offender and they stop following the instructions of the court, they will be published. Trust must be earned by them after they have wronged the community and been found guilty of it.

Finally, I have to say this will be known as Daniel's Law. I absolutely am in awe of what the Morcombes have achieved to help protect our community. Members of the Labor Party who spoke against this over a half a decade ago should be ashamed.

Debate, on motion of Mr Watts, adjourned.