



Speech By


Wendy Bourne

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

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

Second Reading

 **Ms BOURNE** (Ipswich West—ALP) (7.47 pm): I rise today to speak on the Penalties and Sentences (Sexual Offences) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Let me begin by acknowledging the member for Waterford, who asked the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council in 2023 to review how sexual assault and rape offences are sentenced in our state. I would also like to put on the record my thanks to those victim-survivors who had to relive their experiences during consultation on this bill. The Labor opposition supports the bill, but we will not rubberstamp it without ensuring it delivers for victims sooner.

That review was certainly not a tick-and-flick exercise; it was 18 months of deep consultation with survivors, with frontline support workers, with legal experts, with judges and prosecutors and, most importantly, with Queenslanders who had lived through the trauma of sexual violence. That is how good legislation should be developed, and those of us on this side of the House understand that.

What did this process deliver? It delivered 28 clear and detailed recommendations handed to the current Attorney-General last December. Survivors, advocates and communities did their part. They told their stories, they offered their solutions and they made their voices heard. Labor immediately committed to act. In May, when this bill was introduced, the opposition said, 'We will support it this week. Victims and victim-survivors should not have to wait any longer for protections already supported by both sides,' but the LNP government said, 'Not yet.' Here we are—survivors have waited not months but years for change. This government is dragging its feet. Let us be crystal clear: these reforms matter. They are not optional. They are protections survivors deserve today, not in the distant future, yet this government wants to delay them until November 2025.

Why delay making the sexual assault of a child an aggravating factor in sentencing? Why delay recognising that children, our most vulnerable, deserve the full protection of the law and that courts must be empowered to hand down tougher sentencing? Why delay requiring courts to explicitly recognise the lived harm of survivors? Sentencing that ignores the lifelong impact of sexual violence is sentencing that denies reality. It is sentencing that strips away trust in justice. Why delay ending the so-called 'good person' defence? For too long perpetrators have hidden behind testimonials that they are good people, good employees, good mates at the pub as though that erases what they did behind closed doors. Character evidence must be relevant only to rehabilitation or the risk of reoffending. That is common sense. That is justice.

Why delay reforms to victim impact statements? Survivors have told us time and time again that that they are retraumatised in court—they have had to relive the trauma. Sometimes they cannot or choose not to put their pain into words. Silence does not mean the harm is less. Silence does not mean

the trauma disappears. The absence of a victim impact statement must never be taken as evidence that harm is minimal. Yet, across every one of these critical reforms, the government wants to delay its introduction.

In 2023-24 alone, there were 3,898 recorded offences of rape and attempted rape in Queensland. That is around 75 people every single week. That is 75 families every single week. Every week we wait another 75 lives are shattered and our justice system, by delaying these reforms, tells them that they must wait even longer for change. Justice delayed is justice denied. Survivors know it. Communities know it. Those of us on this side of the House know it. The only people who do not seem to understand it are those opposite on the government benches.

The government had a choice. When Labor offered bipartisan support in May, the government could have passed this bill immediately. They could have said that justice cannot wait. Instead, they said, 'Let's push this off. Let's delay the commencement until November 2025.' That is 165 days after bipartisan support was offered. That is not efficiency. That is not leadership. This parliament must stand for survivors. It must stand for families. It must stand for a justice system that is not stacked against the vulnerable.

Every delay undermines trust. Every delay sends a signal that survivors come second. I say to this House: survivors have waited long enough; communities have waited long enough. The time for excuses is over. This bill matters because it strengthens sentencing. It matters because it strengthens trust. It matters because it says to every Queenslanders who has endured sexual violence, 'Your suffering is real, your voice is heard and your parliament will stand with you.'

Justice delayed is justice denied. Every day we wait is another day too many. Let us pass these reforms. Let us pass them now with no delays with the commencement.