

Legislative Council
HANSARD

Tuesday 26 November 2024

The President, Mr Farrell, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

[excerpt...]

**FAMILY VIOLENCE AMENDMENT (PROTECTING PEOPLE AND THEIR
PETS) BILL 2024 (No. 38)**

Second Reading

[excerpt...]

[12.38 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I rise to make a brief contribution on this bill. I am really pleased to do so.

I acknowledge the work that has been done here by the member for Franklin from the other place, Mr O'Byrne, and in this place, bringing the bill, the member for Elwick. I thank her for taking leadership of it.

It is, in some ways, a simple little bill. It is a simple amendment bill. However, it is actually quite illustrative of the work we need to keep doing to make improvements and progress in this area to make our community safer, to make our responses to family violence more effective and to support women and children and their pets who face these issues in our community.

Apart from the leadership taken by the member for Franklin in the other place and the member for Elwick here, I would acknowledge the government and the department have come on board with this bill. The impression is clearly given this is a piece of collaborative work that has been improved through that collaboration. What we have before us today is the result of that, so we are following other jurisdictions in this area and coming into line with them. We are also improving on what has been done in other jurisdictions by learning from them and by listening to advocates in the community and legal sector to ensure this bill does what we would like it to do in the most effective way possible.

I thank other members for more detailed and comprehensive contributions on this and for pointing out the sensitivity of this topic and highlighting the services and support that can be sought if necessary.

I also acknowledge victim/survivors in this area and the significant issue this continues to be. Family violence and domestic abuse in our community continues to be such a significant issue. As the member for Hobart just spoke about in her contribution, rather than looking like an issue we are effectively addressing, this looks increasingly like an issue getting worse. Whether that is through the statistics we see coming through in our criminal justice system, or through the surveys being done on community attitudes, it does look like it is getting worse. Certainly, as is recognised in the second reading speech on this bill, where it quite rightly says

governments right across the country must do more to address family violence and that we need whole-of-government reforms to keep progressing it. I agree with that and the comments from the member for Hobart just now that clearly we are not doing enough. If attitudes and severity of this issue in our community is increasing and increasingly negative, then we are not doing enough.

Ms Forrest - When you hear of young men at school saying 'your body, my choice' and sometimes adding 'forever' at the end of that, we know we have gone a long way back.

Ms WEBB - It is incredibly tragic to hear that. As the member for Hobart said, it is worrying and disturbing for our daughters and the girls in our community but quite frankly, as a mother of a son in his teens, it is also incredibly disturbing for our sons. They are struggling to grow up and become men in a world that is pointing them towards these sort of regressive attitudes. That is an incredibly difficult thing to be facing as a young man in our community. We do need to do more, not just on the side of supporting women and girls, but also finding ways to better support our boys and young men in these areas. That is where we need to take much more purposeful action as a government and as a community.

It is something that I hope men step up into that space more, because women have always been at the forefront of advocacy in relation to family violence and domestic abuse and having to fight for the services and support and the safety that women deserve in our community. We need men in our community to actually fight for the boys and young men who need to have this addressed explicitly in our community, so they can grow up safely and with positive, constructive attitudes that are ultimately not only making the world safer for girls and women, but also making the world safer for them. That sort of masculinity they are being exposed to now is detrimental not just to women and girls, but certainly to boys and young men also.

This bill is responding to something that has been well-recognised as an issue, that family pets and beloved animals in a household can be part of patterns of abuse and coercive control. Threats, harm and neglect can be part of the way that harm is visited on people in a household situation. This is an incredibly positive way forward. In some ways it is a small tweak but an important one. I like that we are improving on what we have learned from other states, that we are including neglect of an animal as part of a potential pattern of abuse or threats of neglect, that we are including that objective test around 'knows or reasonably ought to know' to improve the provability. The better we equip our police, prosecutors and courts to be able to deal with these matters, the better. This is such a good example of how effective effective advocacy and collaborative law-making can come together to a positive outcome and move us forward. I definitely would like to add my voice to those who have already mentioned the wonderful advocacy that is done in our community by a whole range of NGOs, typically women-led NGOs, in the community. In particular here in Tasmania, Engender Equality takes a lead in this, as does the Women's Legal Service Tasmania, Community Legal Centres, Women's Health Tasmania, and a whole range of others, so I do not mean to exclude anyone from mention there.

I recognise that crisis support, as mentioned by the member for Hobart, is such a glaring gap here at the moment. It is simply unacceptable that when women seek help and seek to exit situations of family violence and domestic abuse, we do not have somewhere for them to go and stay. This is unconscionable. I heard Janet Saunders, the CEO of the Hobart Women's Shelter, talking on the radio recently about how the statistics show that over recent years they have typically had to turn away 8 in 10 women seeking crisis housing support, 8 in 10. But, here is the absolute tragedy, it has now increased to 9 in 10 women the Hobart Women's Shelter is turning away because they do not have the capacity to support them. That's 9 in 10 women

seeking support to escape situations of family violence and domestic abuse. How can that possibly not be the number one priority on any government's agenda? How can that possibly not be something that is in the news and being addressed by government every day in a much more active way than we see it being addressed now?

That is not to take away from efforts that are being made through various programs and supports; the government is happy to list those at any time they are able, but it is not enough. It is not enough in that crisis housing space. The government and we as a community are failing Tasmanian women and children in not providing enough crisis support when women are at their most vulnerable, at the time they want to leave.

We need to do much more. We are in the second day of 16 days of activism, highlighting the need to do more around gendered violence, and this is a very opportune time to be passing this bill. It is wonderful that there is so much support around the Chamber for the bill - cross-party support, cross-Chamber support. That is so positive, but I cannot help but emphasise that we cannot pat ourselves on the back and be complacent here; this is just a small step on a pathway that stretches before us with many, many more significant steps needed, particularly to address crisis situations where women are at their most vulnerable. When I say that, what I mean is at most risk of being killed. As we hear so often, those statistics of one woman a week is actually worse this year; it is more than one woman a week being killed in our country.

That is a brief contribution, for no reason other than this is a well-regarded, well-accepted bill brought forward in such a collaborative, positive way. I am very happy to add my voice to support it.

[excerpt ends...]