

**JUSTICE MISCELLANEOUS (REPORTING PROCEDURES)
BILL 2025 (No. 10)**

Second Reading

[2.50 p.m.]

Mr BARNETT (Lyons - Minister for Justice) - Deputy Speaker, I move -

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill contains amendments to reporting procedures in three acts within my justice portfolio. Importantly, one of the amendments implements recommendation 19.6 of the commission of inquiry into the Tasmanian government's responses to child sexual abuse.

As I have said before, the government is committed to the important work of implementing all 191 recommendations of the commission of inquiry. This bill is another step towards fulfilling the commitment well in advance of the 1 July 2026 due date identified by the commission. In fact, this amendment was originally consulted on as part of a broader justice miscellaneous bill scheduled for introduction at a later date, but I am pleased to have the opportunity to bring this amendment forward.

The other two amendments are in relation to the Magistrates Court and the Supreme Court. They achieve greater consistency with reporting dates in other legislation. This streamlines processes and improves the timelines of tabling their end reports in parliament, for more timely reporting.

I will now outline the proposed amendments. The amendment to the *Registration to Work with Vulnerable People Act 2013* implements recommendation 19.6 of the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings report. Recommendation 19.6:

The Tasmanian Government should introduce legislation to amend the *Registration to Work with Vulnerable People Act 2013*, to clarify that in addition to the duty to report in certain circumstances, any person can notify reportable behaviour to the registrar of the Registration to Work with Vulnerable People Scheme.

The Registration to Work with Vulnerable People Act establishes a screening and monitoring system for people who work with vulnerable people including children and young people. Currently, the act provides that it is a duty of a reporting body to notify the registrar of reportable behaviour. A reporting body includes a government department or state authority, other licensing bodies, Tasmania Police, and any other prescribed bodies. Reportable behaviour is prescribed in the regulations as behaviour that poses a risk of harm to vulnerable persons by reason of neglect, abuse or other conduct.

The commission of inquiry found that although the act contemplates the registrar receiving information about reportable behaviour other than through the duty to report, there is no specific legislative provision for receiving this information. It therefore recommended that the Act clarify that any person can notify reportable behaviour to the registrar.

I should say that members of the public do already notify the registrar from time to time. This amendment will clarify an important part of the registrar's work within the broader system

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under which concerned Tasmanians can raise concerns.

The primary response systems for raising urgent child safety concerns are the Child Safety Service's Advice and Referral Line under notification provisions in the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997*, or notifying police. For example, the Advice and Referral Line can be contacted online or by phone on 1800 000 123.

Child Safety Services and police both already notify the registrar of concerns they receive. However, this amendment does strengthen the options. The message in the government's work to implement COI (commission of inquiry) recommendations is that a person does not need to know the best government agency to notify regarding child safety concerns, as we have a network of response systems.

The new 53AB inserted by the bill provides for voluntary notifications of reportable behaviour by a person. It provides for a person notifying the registrar if they become aware of or suspect that another person is engaged in reportable behaviour, and believes that person is registered or has applied for registration under the act.

A voluntary notification is to include, as far as it is known, the name of and any other identifying particulars of the person who engaged in the behaviour. This may include, for example, any places the person works or volunteers. It is also to include the details of the alleged reportable behaviour.

The bill clarifies that this notification provision allows a person to report behaviour whether or not it occurs before or after the commencement of this act. The bill also includes a clarifying amendment to the regulation-making powers so regulations can be made, if needed, in relation to the new voluntary notification provision, in addition to the current regulation-making power for reporting bodies.

Making regulations for notifications has not been necessary to date, but if any further statutory guidance is required this power can be used. This amendment was added to the bill when finalising it.

To implement these amendments, it is intended that the registration to work with vulnerable people website will be updated to include an online reporting pathway for the public to register concerns with the scheme. Other reporting options are also being considered.

The reporting pathways will be accompanied by guidance about how to report and what information to include. In addition, people raising concerns about immediate risk to vulnerable people will be directed to Tasmania Police and the Child Safety Services Advice and Referral Line for immediate response. Importantly, concerns provided to Child Safety Services or Tasmania Police are already referred by them to the registrar.

Once reports are received, they will be matched where possible against the register of applicants and registered persons and appropriate action taken in line within the provisions of the act. This could include seeking further information from the person making the report or other bodies, further risk assessments, making determinations regarding a person's application or registration such as cancellation or suspension, and/or providing information to other authorities for action.

Currently, on or before 30 November each year, the Chief Justice and the Chief Magistrate respectively must prepare and provide to the minister an annual report that includes

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details of the administration of justice and other matters for each court. The minister must cause a copy of the annual report to be laid on the table of each House of Parliament within 10 sitting days of receiving it. Annual reports are an important tool for government, parliament and the public to assess the performance and achievements of any of an entity throughout the year. The bill changes the date the annual reports are due from 30 November to 31 October. This change will ensure consistency with many other annual reporting statutory time frames. As a result, this means reports will be received in time to be tabled in parliament by the end of the relevant calendar year. I would like to thank the public and other stakeholders who considered these amendments during the consultation period.

There was support from relevant agencies, but no external submissions on these amendments received for publication on the department's website. The bill released for consultation did include other amendments, some of which did receive stakeholder comment.

The feedback on those other amendments is under consideration so they can be progressed in later sittings.

I am pleased to progress these amendments which update and strengthen reporting provisions in the relevant acts, most importantly in relation to the *Registration to Work with Vulnerable People Act 2013* to clarify and improve our systems for protecting children.

Deputy Speaker, I commend the bill to the House.