

Media Release

The Hon Martin Pakula MP
Attorney-General
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Getting Things Done.
Making Things Fair.

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MAKING IT FAIRER FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

Victims of youth crime will be able to share their stories publicly and child sex offenders will be prevented from using evidence of their good character to argue for lesser sentences, under a suite of new laws to be introduced by the Andrews Labor Government today.

The Justice Legislation Amendment (Victims) Bill 2017 will make sweeping changes to better support victims of crime and hold offenders to account by:

- changing Children’s Court publication restrictions to allow adult victims to share their stories publicly
- preventing child sex offenders from using evidence of good character to argue for more lenient sentences, consistent with a recommendation from the Royal Commission
- scrapping the two-year time limit for childhood abuse victims to seek compensation from VOCAT
- introducing intermediaries, who will help vulnerable victims give evidence in court and to police.

The Labor Government will amend the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* to change the way publication restrictions in the Children’s Court apply to victims of youth crime. Under the reforms, restrictions regarding the identification of an adult victim will be removed so they can share their story publicly without fear of prosecution.

The Government will also create new laws to ensure that people who commit sexual offences against children will no longer be able to argue for leniency in sentencing based on their lack of previous convictions or evidence of good character, where that good character facilitated the offending.

This reform will implement a key recommendation from the Criminal Justice Report by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse which stated: *“that good character be excluded as a mitigating factor in sentencing for child sexual abuse offences where that good character facilitated the offending”*.

Additionally, childhood abuse victims will no longer face a two-year time limit in applying for compensation to the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT). The change implements a recommendation from the 2013 *Betrayal of Trust* report, recognising that many victims of childhood abuse are unable to apply for help within two years.

The Bill will also implement the introduction of the pilot scheme for intermediaries – skilled communication specialists – to help child witnesses or those with cognitive impairments to give evidence in court. Special ‘ground rules hearings’ will also be introduced, to provide rules and guidance regarding the cross-examination of vulnerable witnesses and the use of intermediaries in proceedings.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Martin Pakula

“We’re making significant changes to support victims of crime and help them through the justice system.”

“The abuse of children is a horrific crime. For too long, child sex offenders have used evidence of their good character to argue for more lenient sentences – we’re changing that.”

“We’re also making it fairer for childhood abuse victims to access compensation through VOCAT by scrapping the two-year time limit for claims.”

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