

Putting a **Full Stop** to sexual, domestic and family violence.



22 June 2026

Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee
Queensland Parliament, Brisbane QLD 4000

Via email

Re: Submission — Civil Liability (Holding Institutions Accountable for Child Abuse) Amendment Bill 2026

To the Justice, Integrity and Safety Committee

Full Stop Australia thanks the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission on the Civil Liability (Holding Institutions Accountable for Child Abuse) Amendment Bill 2026 (the Bill). We strongly support the Bill and urge the Committee to recommend its passage in full.

About Full Stop Australia

Full Stop Australia is a national not-for-profit organisation, which has been working in the field of sexual, domestic and family violence since 1974. We perform the following functions:

- Provide expert and confidential telephone, online and face-to-face counselling to people of all genders across Australia who have experienced sexual, domestic or family violence, and specialist help for their supporters;
- Conduct best practice training and professional services to support frontline workers, government, and the corporate and not-for-profit sectors; and
- Advocate to governments and in the media for laws and systems that better respond to, and ultimately prevent, gender-based violence.

Our advocacy draws on the expertise of our trauma-specialist counsellors, who support people impacted by sexual, domestic and family violence across the country, including in Queensland. It also draws on the lived expertise of our clients and survivor-advocates. We are committed to centering the voices of victim-survivors in our work.

Relevant to this submission, Full Stop Australia has been a recognised provider of the National Redress Scheme (NRS) since 2013, delivering the National Sexual Abuse and Redress Support Service nationally. In 2024-25, we provided support to 696 clients across 2,521 occasions of service through our 24/7 national Redress helpline, and application and counselling support to 383 clients across 3,591 occasions of service to clients across Australia. We receive approximately 50 new Redress clients per month through the helpline and 65 new clients per month for casework support.

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Why This Bill Matters

The High Court's decision in *Bird v DP* (2024) HCA 41 was a significant setback for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse. The Court held that vicarious liability cannot arise from relationships akin to employment under common law. In practice, this means institutions, including religious organisations, sporting clubs and community groups can avoid civil liability for abuse by clergy, volunteers and contractors who were not formal employees, regardless of the authority those individuals held over children in the institution's care.

This is not an abstract legal question. From our direct work with victim-survivors navigating the National Redress Scheme (NRS), we know what it costs a person to come forward, often decades after the abuse occurred. We also know what happens when legal and administrative decisions close pathways to justice. The harm is real and immediate.

Through our Redress Support Service, we consistently see:

- Victim-survivors who wait years or decades before they feel able to seek any form of acknowledgement, due to shame, trauma, fear of not being believed, and deep distrust of institutions
- Profound psychological harm caused by legal uncertainty and adverse decisions, which compound the original trauma
- Victim-survivors who accepted settlements under a weakened legal framework, without fully understanding what rights they may have had or were giving up
- The distress caused when civil liability questions intersect with NRS decisions — uncertainty about what legal options remain is itself a source of ongoing harm for many survivors.

The majority in *Bird v DP* explicitly acknowledged that reform was a matter for legislatures. Queensland's Parliament is now called upon to act, and this Bill sets out an appropriate response.

There are some specific challenges facing victim survivors in Queensland.

- A significant proportion of those seeking redress in Queensland are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who have historically been underrepresented in legal action relating to sexual abuse and in applications for the National Redress Scheme.
- As a large, geographically diverse state with persistent legal access gaps (particularly in regional and remote areas), many of Queensland's victim-survivors have no active support in navigating either redress or civil processes. These are the people for whom this reform matters most.

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Case Study — Queensland Survivor Experience

John (pseudonym) is an Aboriginal man in his 50s living with the long-term impacts of institutional child sexual abuse, including PTSD, anxiety and depression. He has low literacy levels and finds legal processes confusing and overwhelming.

John received advice that he could pursue a civil claim but found the prospect of court proceedings, repeatedly recounting his trauma, cross-examination, legal costs, too distressing to engage with. He chose instead to apply to the National Redress Scheme with Full Stop Australia's support, which offered a more accessible and less adversarial pathway.

John's experience reflects what we see regularly: for many survivors, the barriers to civil litigation are personal, cultural and practical. With support, some of those barriers can be addressed.

For victim-survivors who step forward to pursue a civil claim in spite of the many challenges blocking their way, the provisions put forward by this Bill mean that that pathway is not closed before it begins.

Consistency and Accountability

Full Stop Australia has considered the Bill against good practice reforms already enacted in several Australian jurisdictions and we are satisfied it reflects a sound approach.

The ACT was the first jurisdiction to respond to *Bird v DP*, passing the Civil Law (Wrongs) (Organisational Child Abuse Liability) Amendment Act 2025 unanimously in October 2025. The ACT adopted the broadest model to date, covering individuals akin to employees and those associated with an organisation, including volunteers and contractors applied retrospectively.

Victoria passed the Justice Legislation Amendment (Vicarious Liability for Child Abuse) Act 2026 unanimously in February 2026. Victoria's legislation also included a provision enabling survivors to apply to have settlements or judgments made between the *Bird v DP* decision and the Act's commencement set aside where just and reasonable, the same approach proposed in this Bill.

Both jurisdictions demonstrate that this form of legislation is constitutionally sound, operationally workable, and can garner support from across the parliament and the community.

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Full Stop Australia's Position

Full Stop Australia supports the Bill and specifically support changes to the effect of:

- Extension of vicarious liability to persons in 'relationships akin to employment'. This directly addresses the injustice created by Bird v DP and restores meaningful civil redress for survivors of abuse by clergy, volunteers and others who operated within institutional authority over children.
- Retrospective application of the amendments. Institutional child sexual abuse is overwhelmingly historical in nature. Limiting reforms to future conduct would leave the vast majority of Queensland survivors without any remedy.
- Enabling courts to set aside certain prior settlements where just and reasonable. Victim-survivors should not be permanently bound by outcomes shaped by a distorted legal landscape or process. The just and reasonable threshold ensures appropriate judicial oversight.

Our colleagues at Queensland Sexual Assault Network (QSAN) have recommended that the application of the Bill is extended beyond 'relationships akin to employment' to 'those associated with the organisation' to ensure there are no further loopholes. We support serious consideration of this recommendation.

We urge the Committee to recommend passage of this Bill without any narrowing of its scope or retrospective effect.

Full Stop Australia is available to provide further information if that would be of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Bevan".

Karen Bevan

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