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Parliamentary Apology to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in Victorian government schools

Today, we offer our formal and sincere apology to every person who was sexually abused as a student of a Victorian government school.

We failed to protect you. We failed to listen when you tried to disclose or explain what was done to you. We failed to act with the urgency, responsibility and care that you deserved.

For those historical failures, and for the harm done to you as a result, we are deeply sorry.

The shame of these crimes is not yours. It never was. The shame belongs to the perpetrators who abused you. It belongs with the institutions that failed to protect you. And it belongs with the systems that looked away when children and young people needed adults to act.

We acknowledge the harm these crimes have caused, and the impacts you continue to carry.

We acknowledge what was taken from you: the right to be safe at school, the freedom to learn in a supportive environment, the confidence to trust the adults around you, and the enjoyment of experiences and milestones that should have been ordinary parts of childhood — but were instead marked by fear.

The impacts of these crimes did not end when the abuse ended. They have affected health, relationships, education, work, trust, identity, intimacy, wellbeing and decision-making — and altered lives in ways that cannot be undone.

We also acknowledge that the harm caused by child sexual abuse ripples across families, relationships and generations, and is also carried by loved ones and supporters.

Every person who has experienced child sexual abuse has the right to be heard, believed and treated with care and respect. They have the right to receive a response that places their safety, dignity and wellbeing first.

We acknowledge the additional harm caused when those who sought help were ignored, disbelieved, silenced, blamed or threatened. Those failures deepened the harm and continue to represent a profound betrayal of trust.

We want you to know that, even though you were not heard then, you are heard now. And we believe you.

We honour the courage of victims and their loved ones who fought to be heard, sought answers, brought these crimes into the open and demanded accountability. Victim-survivors and their loved ones have been forced to drive changes that institutions should have led themselves. That responsibility belonged with government, the Department of Education, schools, and the adults who failed to act. Today, we commit to carrying that responsibility forward through action.

We will continue to pursue accountability for perpetrators and institutional failures. We will continue to support victim-survivors and their families in ways that recognise the enduring impacts of these crimes, including through better access to information and records, services for adult victim-survivors, and restorative engagement approaches. We will create an environment in which child sexual abuse can be acknowledged and spoken about openly, so that concerns can be raised, heard and acted upon.

Lasting change requires individuals and institutions to confront difficult realities and ensure that silence is not allowed to protect perpetrators or reputations. And we will continue to strengthen the systems, safeguards and culture needed to protect every child and young person attending a Victorian government school.

To every victim-survivor:

We are sorry.

We are sorry that you were sexually assaulted or raped when you were a student in a government school.

We are sorry for the harm done to you — and the impacts you and your loved ones continue to carry.

We are sorry for the failures that allowed this to occur.

No apology can fully capture what was taken from you, your families and loved ones.

No words can undo what was done.

No statement from a Parliament can restore the childhoods, teenage years, opportunities, relationships, and lives that these crimes stole.

But that is not a reason for silence.

For too long, silence protected perpetrators and institutions instead of children.

So today, we name these crimes publicly and plainly.

To every victim-survivor and to those victims who are no longer with us:

You had the right to be safe at school.

Your childhood should have been shaped by safety, care, learning and trust.

Instead, for too many, it was shaped by abuse, fear and betrayal.

We acknowledge the profound impact these crimes have had on you, your families, your loved ones and those who have supported you.

We accept responsibility for the failures that allowed these crimes to occur.

And we are deeply sorry.