

## Community Support and Services Committee

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 30 November 2021 9:29 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** Community Support and Services Committee; Maiwar Electorate Office  
**Subject:** Submission on the Criminal Law (Raising the Age of Responsibility) Amendment Bill 2021

Dear [REDACTED]

To the Community Support and Services Committee, CC my local MP:

I'd like to comment on the Criminal Law (Raising the Age of Responsibility) Amendment Bill 2021, and express my support for an alternative, non-punitive model for under-14s.

As my comments relate to my personal experiences as a juvenile offender, I request that my information remains anonymous.

When I was around 11 years old, I committed a string a break-ins with a group of "friends".

At the time, I couldn't articulate why I did it. Now, as I approach middle age, I can tell you that I was struggling socially, having been teased and bullied since I was very young and coming to terms with multiple sexual assaults. I didn't mean to fall in with this crowd, I simply took the first group that wanted me as a friend. Perhaps we gravitated towards each other. Those kids were also struggling with historic and ongoing sexual and physical abuse, parental abandonment, and drug and alcohol issues.

When I was arrested, the police called me "feral". The judge was scary and made me cry in a crowded courtroom. My mother was so ashamed she was sick in the car on the way home. I was written out of the family will. My grandfather wouldn't talk to me for years. I lost all my friends and eventually changed schools. My immediate and extended family didn't trust me for at least a decade. I deserved all of this. I may not have gone to prison, but I was certainly punished.

My sentence was a year of probation and monthly psychologist appointments. I was terrified of going to juvenile detention and so relieved that the judge took pity on me. No good would have come from putting a clearly very impressionable child, struggling to make healthy relationships into a place with children in the exact same or worse situation. One of the boys I knew had been and said all he learned was how to hot wire a car. I didn't want to be someone like that.

I needed mental health care. I needed counselling. I couldn't articulate any of that at the time and I dealt with my trauma of repeated sexual assault and bullying by going along with the first people who wanted to be my friend. My story is sad. I wasn't just a troublemaker. I was troubled and no one helped me until I'd gone past the point of no return.

Now, with the help of my psychologist, I'm working through my intense guilt and shame from that time and finally addressing the traumas that led me to that point. I now realise my brain was completely underdeveloped. I had no concept of what I was doing. I was incapable of saying no and basically followed the lemmings off the cliff. Juvenile offenders have barely started puberty. Their brains are full of hormones, they can't think straight. They have no life experience. They are children reacting to their experiences and when those experiences are bad...well, you can see how this ends up.

To the homeowners and families I impacted. I am truly, deeply sorry for what I did. I have no right to ask for your forgiveness. I can only hope that my actions were only a blip on your otherwise happy life and you don't think about the break-in anymore.

I've worked hard from that time onwards to be a better person. I've gotten good grades, have been employed consistently since I left school and now run my own business while studying. I am married with a young family and live in a nice house. Aside from one parking ticket, I haven't broken the law since. I am not who I was at 11.

I was reluctant to share my experiences because of the shame I feel and fear of my friends, colleagues or community finding out about what I've done. But ultimately, I decided, I had to write this because there are countless other children who've experienced enough trauma to bring them to the point of offending. I want you to see that we can rehabilitate and go on to lead ordinary lives, without crime. We aren't a lost cause. Please help us by raising the age of criminal responsibility to a minimum of 14 years and keeping children out of prison.

Yours sincerely,

