

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL 2023

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Attachments:

Submitter Comments:

Committee Secretary
Economics and Governance Committee
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Committee Secretary,

Submission made by Pam Barker, CEO, on behalf of Brisbane Youth Service

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Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) was founded in 1976 in response to the issue of youth homelessness and has grown from a single worker to more than 90 staff. We holistically support homeless and vulnerable young people aged between 12 and 25 years, and their children, to secure and maintain housing; address physical and mental health issues; establish successful relationships and support networks; and access pathways to education and employment.

In response to the proposed *Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023* we wish to reiterate our call that the Queensland Parliament and the Queensland State Government **get smarter, not tougher** on youth crime. To this end we do not support the *Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023*.

It is incredibly disheartening to see the Queensland Government ignore data, research evidence, and the voices of experts and organisations who work with young people that demonstrate the measures proposed in the Bill will do little to reduce reoffending.

Locking up more kids for longer is simply not the answer to improving community safety. On the contrary, without greater focus on early intervention, community sanctions, and rehabilitation, the measures proposed in the Bill will increase the likelihood of children entering a lifelong cycle of reoffending and incarceration. Such cycles have a high economic and social cost to the community. There are evidence-based solutions to the problem of young people's offending, but the proposed Bill indicates the Government is not listening.

We make the following specific points:

The reactionary approach the Government has taken to the issue of youth offending has led to **a lack of sector consultation and engagement with experts in the field**, including consultation with Youth Justice Strategy Reference Group.

We feel there is **no exceptional case to be made** by the Government that justifies the need to override the Human Rights Act, and that ensuring young people comply with bail conditions can be achieved in less harmful and more effective ways. Lack of suitable, safe accommodation is a persistent factor that prevents young people from complying with bail conditions. This is especially relevant for the following groups of young people:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people
- Young people in regional and remote areas
- Young people with complex needs, including young people experiencing homelessness after exiting the child protection system and young people with mental health issues
- Young people with complex offending histories such as those that the proposed Bill targets

Evidence-based solutions include:

- Programs to help place young people in suitable accommodation
- Nominating multiple bail addresses
- Training police and courts to set appropriate bail conditions

All efforts should be made to divert children and young people away from the criminal justice system, including youth detention and adult correctional centres; especially those young people under the age of 14 whose healthy development is a human right. Recidivism is significantly lower for young people who have community sanctions imposed compared to those with custodial sanctions. Community sanctions can include community service, behavioural intervention programs, court diversions, fines, intensive supervision orders and probation.

The proposed *Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023* is clearly designed to increase the number of incarcerated young people. The Government has committed to increasing the capacity of youth detention, with the construction of two new centres recently announced. Yet there is no evidence that the Government understands the need to build therapeutic youth detention centres that aim to reduce reoffending by addressing the causes of young people's offending, focus on rehabilitation, and facilitate a safe supported exit into the community. Where detention is required, then youth justice detention centres should:

- provide appropriate programs to all detainees
- properly train and supervise staff
- have systems in place to ensure operational integrity is maintained; and
- make education programs available to as many detainees as possible and for as long as possible.

We urge you to read 'Youth justice in Australia: Themes from Recent Inquiries' by Clancey, Wang and Lin, published in *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 605 October, 2020, by Australian Institute of Criminology for an excellent summary of the detrimental impacts of youth detention.

Yours sincerely,



PAM BARKER
Chief Executive Officer

Sources

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