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JUSTICE, INTEGRITY AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr MA Hunt MP—Chair
Hon. GJ Butcher MP
Ms AJ Baillie MP
Hon. DE Farmer MP

Staff present:

Ms F Denny—Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE EXPANDING ADULT CRIME, ADULT TIME AND TAKING A STRONG STANCE ON DRUGS AND ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AMENDMENT BILL 2026

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 9 April 2026

Townsville

THURSDAY, 9 APRIL 2026

The subcommittee met at 9.02 am.

CHAIR: Good morning, everybody. It is great to be back in Townsville with the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026. My name is Marty Hunt MP, member for Nicklin and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today.

With me here today as a subcommittee of the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee are: the Hon. Di Farmer MP, member for Bulimba, substituting for Peter Russo MP, member for Toohey; the Hon. Glenn Butcher MP, member for Gladstone, substituting for Michael Berkman MP, member for Maiwar; and Adam Baillie MP, member for Townsville, substituting for Natalie Marr MP, member for Thuringowa. I also want to acknowledge the presence in the room of the member for Hinchinbrook, Wayde Chiesa. I have an apology from the member for Mundingburra, Janelle Poole, but Janelle will be joining us as soon as she is available.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

The Legislative Assembly and its committees recognise that matters awaiting or under adjudication in all courts exercising a criminal jurisdiction should not be referred to from the moment a charge is made against a person until the matter is resolved in court. All witnesses are therefore reminded not to refer to matters before the criminal courts in their evidence. This has been an issue in the past. I really need people to understand that, if somebody has committed an offence against you and has been charged but it has not been resolved by the court yet, you are not permitted to talk about it in a public hearing, so please do not do that.

As chair, I also ask members and witnesses to observe standing order 117, which restricts the naming of at-risk children. Importantly, evidence today should not readily identify a child who is subject to either the Child Protection Act 1999 or the Youth Justice Act 1992. I also remind members of the public they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

These proceedings are also being transcribed by Hansard. Media are present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages.

Finally, the committee notes that today's hearing could be triggering for those who have been affected by crime. If any witnesses today require a break during proceedings, please indicate. Please also approach the secretariat—Fran, here—if today's proceedings raise any issues for you. Please turn your mobile phones off or switch them to silent mode.

DAMETTO, Mr Nick, Mayor, Townsville City Council

CHAIR: I now welcome Mayor Nick Dametto, representing the Townsville City Council. Good morning, Mayor. I invite you to make an opening statement to the committee, after which we will go to questions.

Mr Dametto: Thank you very much. Good morning, Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members and the member for Townsville, Adam Baillie. Firstly, I want to thank the committee for coming to Townsville. It demonstrates that you understand we still have problems here. We have problems that we want to fix and we want to fix them in conjunction with the state government. That is the consensus from the Townsville City Council.

I am here to speak today on the expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time legislation. I will take a strong view on the designated business and community precinct provisions of the bill. Why does this matter for Townsville? In Townsville, our CBD, for too long, has been experiencing decades of recurring public intoxication and disorderly behaviour. This kind of behaviour is disturbing and it has created a scenario

where a lot of those small, local businesses that have been loyal to the CBD have found it, in some cases, almost impossible to continue to trade. Shoppers, tourists and people just wanting to work safely in the CBD have been driven away by this behaviour.

What has been done so far? The current state government has created the Townsville Anti-Social Behaviour Response Governance Group, a combined effort of the Queensland Police Service, Housing and state agencies, as well as the Townsville City Council. I believe we have been working well together. The group has done great work so far, gathering strong data and developing an understanding of who is actually in the CBD creating these unsafe scenarios, where they are from and who has been working with them thus far. Despite this incredibly hard work and boots on the ground, we have also seen evidence that we are not winning this battle with the current legislation and police powers.

What we are dealing with essentially right now is about 150 individuals who are congregating in the CBD or in Dean Park. We know they are highly transient, often cycling between places like Townsville, Palm Island and the North-West Queensland regions, and also have had multiple interactions with Corrections and the hospital facilities. A common assumption is that most individuals in the CBD are homeless. This is not the case. Approximately 35 per cent of the cohort have accommodation options locally here in Townsville. It is also not solely a homelessness issue. An issue of the transient population means that a problem here in Townsville today could be a problem in Palm Island, Mount Isa or Cairns tomorrow.

I believe the time for legislative change is right now. We have quite a commercial interest from the Townsville City Council in revitalising the CBD. We have been working closely with Economic Development Queensland on our priority development area that we want to recreate in the CBD. We want to attract investment back to our city centre. We want to attract investment from those wanting to build apartments all the way through to business houses. But we cannot do this alone. We do need a helping hand. I believe the designated business and community precincts provisions and the powers given to police in conjunction with that would allow us to start working to disperse some of those people in the area.

The idea of banning people for 24 hours for certain behaviour is welcomed by me and the Townsville City Council, and being able to escalate that to a 30-day ban, I think, is crucial to showing that there is a line in the sand—that something needs to be done here. It also stops the recurring behaviour which is deeply engrained. We need a circuit-breaker right now in the city centre, in the CBD. The traders, those people who visit and Townsville residents are demanding this. I am now open for questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mayor. You talked about businesses in the CBD. I imagine your tourism industry would be reluctant to talk down the town, but what impact is antisocial behaviour having on the tourist experience in Townsville and are there any zones that you think should be designated under this act related to that sort of business?

Mr Dametto: That is a very good question, Chair. We are attracting more tourists than ever to Townsville. The cruise ship terminal is booked out almost every second week during the season. We want to bring people into the city centre. When we have an influx of over 1,500 people coming into the city, we want the small and local businesses to be able to actually benefit from that. We want to take them to The Strand. We want to take them to places and small businesses all around the city for tourism opportunities, but we want to bring them into our city centre. That is our heart. Right now our heart has multiple stains on it. Right now the city centre has the kind of behaviour that drives people away and has the effect of leaving a negative impact on those who visit this beautiful city by the ocean, a stone's throw from Magnetic Island, who have had a very negative experience while trying to buy a T-shirt or have a quiet meal in the city centre.

Ms FARMER: Thank you, Mayor, for your submission, for appearing today and for your obvious passion for your city. I want to quote directly from your submission where you say, 'Council recognises that a singular DBCP declaration risks nearly displacing behavioural issues into neighbouring suburbs.' I have a couple of questions about that. What will you do if in fact that occurs? Your local big shopping centres or parks or other gathering places now actually experience these same issues as in the CBD. I know you say that you hope that the government will introduce more precincts. What if they do not? What if you are waiting a long time? How will council manage that? What would you expect from the government to manage that potential significant disruption in the suburbs?

Mr Dametto: The fact that moving people on from the CBD will displace them to other places should not be a reason not to do something. I want to make that very clear. However, we do need to make sure that people understand the type of behaviour that we expect in our city and in our state.

Public drunkenness, carrying on and abusing people in the middle of the day—I do not care if that is in the city centre or in one of our local shopping centres—that is behaviour we do not tolerate and should not tolerate.

People should feel comfortable driving to a shopping centre, driving to our city centre, driving to any part of Townsville or any part of Queensland, to jump out of their vehicle in the middle of the day and walk safely to the shops or walk safely to a cafe. That means that, if you are moving people on from an area where they have been congregating, police need to be resourced and be willing to make sure that antisocial behaviour in other areas is also not tolerated. For the shopping centres, I would love to see some of these designated business and community precincts applied to the shopping centres as well, because they are dealing with just as many troubles as we are.

Ms FARMER: So you want to be sure of the government's commitment to police resourcing in those areas?

Mr Dametto: Police resourcing but also when it comes to health: if people have flown here for a medical service and they cannot get home because they have missed their flight back, there need to be some wraparound services to get them back to where they have come from so they do not loiter and become vagrants in our city. We want to make sure that those who are coming out of Corrections have wraparound services so they are not just moving into Dean Park or under Victoria Bridge and causing havoc. Those are the kind of things that we need services to really pick up their act on.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you for joining us today, Mayor Dametto. I want you to expand, if you could, on the Townsville Anti-Social Behaviour Response Governance Group. That has been a development and a lot of effort has gone into that behind the scenes over the last several months. Can you expand on how that response group is working to ensure services are getting to these people sooner and assisting them in making better choices going forward as far as early intervention is concerned rather than waiting for the antisocial behaviour to escalate to a point where ambulances are required and hospital services are required?

Mr Dametto: It has really become a good working group, but at times it has felt like Townsville City Council and QPS versus the world. There are other state government services and even not-for-profit organisations that have been tasked to help out in this space that I believe could be doing better. Once again, police are doing a fantastic job working with the Townsville City Council security guards we have working out there on the beat, you might say. We can move them on, but it is like you turn the lights on, move them on and then turn lights off and they run back. You need to make sure that Housing, Corrections and those non-for profits that are being tasked and well funded to look after people when they are doing it tough are doing their job.

Another interesting thing to note is that a lot of the not-for-profits are trying to do good things. I asked this question a little while ago: why are people who are living in Dean Park so messy with the things they own? The problem is that after they have been asked to clean it up, someone puts it in the bin for them and then a not-for-profit will give them a new shirt, a new mattress, a new pillow and the process starts again. You have a group of people who are not respecting or looking after the things they have or own.

Mr BUTCHER: In your opening statement you mentioned 35 per cent of people who have been identified actually have a place or a home to go to. That leaves 65 per cent of those people in the CBD, or in the areas you are talking about, who are homeless or transient. These laws that we are talking about today do not actually stop people from being homeless in the CBD.

Mr Dametto: No, they don't.

Mr BUTCHER: You touched on services that are there. The need for homes is critical. Can you touch on what the council is doing in relation to those services and are there enough services to cater for that cohort in the CBD that has nowhere to go and no home to live in?

Mr Dametto: The short answer is that we just need to build more homes. It does not matter if it is the state government tipping in, local government doing their part to unlock more housing opportunities, or opportunities for more affordable, public and just everyday housing. My statement in regard to wanting to move these people out of these areas is not coming from a place of heartlessness for someone who is homeless, but just because you are homeless does not give you the right to carry on the kind of behaviour that we are seeing in places like Dean Park, Victoria Bridge or our city centre. My heart bleeds for those people who have no home, but it does not give them a hall pass for the type of behaviour we are seeing.

Addressing homelessness though, even if we had \$1 billion to throw at building homeless shelters or housing tomorrow, we do not have a number of things—from the materials right through to the people to do it. I think the housing that we are building at the moment is in line with our capacity. The state government through its trunk infrastructure funding, the RAF funding, is doing good things to unlock housing at the moment. The Townsville City Council has the perspective right now that we are open for business. If you want to build infill right now, if you want to build apartments, if you want to do a subdivision, we want to talk to you because the only way we can fix this problem is to build our way out of it.

Mr BUTCHER: Going back to the 65 per cent, there is a group in town that had identified them and had been talking to the homeless. Out of that 65 per cent, do you know what percentage would welcome the opportunity to go home if they had one or to go to a shelter?

Mr Dametto: I think most people would be happy to go to a home if they could. Getting back to the 35 per cent, there would be people within that 65 per cent as well who are quite happy being in the park or quite happy drinking with friends or socialising in an antisocial way. That is not to say that every one of those 65 per cent who are sitting there right now in the park or the CBD are just begging for somewhere to go. There are a million places across Townsville to go right now. Even if you are homeless, there are opportunities to book in somewhere, to go to a homeless shelter, to try to seek help, but a lot of them are not.

CHAIR: Well done for identifying this bill is about behaviour, not homelessness. This bill is targeting behaviour. In the last minute we have here, I want to touch on drug use. In the crime figures that came out the other day, there was a 43 per cent increase in drug offences last year in Townsville. What impact is drug use having in Townsville?

Mr Dametto: Drug use makes it into every facet of society. You have lawyers right through to kids using drugs. Everyone knows someone in their own family or friendship group who uses drugs. Drug use is prevalent throughout society. Drug offences though continue to rise, I believe, off the back of many different social issues. It does not mean we should just allow it to happen. Increasing drug offences can in some ways bring down usage and it does send the message that using drugs is not a good thing.

CHAIR: That brings the time allocated for your evidence today to an end. We appreciate you giving evidence before the committee today.

BOOTH, Mr Kevin, President, Townsville Chamber of Commerce

CHAIR: I now welcome the representative from the Townsville Chamber of Commerce. I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr Booth: Good morning and thank you, Chair and the committee, for this session today. It provides a great opportunity to ensure voices from all regions are heard and not just those from the south-east corner. Today I speak on behalf of the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, an organisation that has been advocating for Townsville businesses for almost 145 years. We were the second chamber of commerce in Queensland, behind Brisbane, and we represent over 350 businesses varying in size across the entire Townsville area.

We are here to support the enablement and declaration of the designated business community precinct, as well as the general overview of the emphasis of antisocial behaviour within our community. Much like Townsville City Council, we are in favour of an expanded sized DBCP that not just covers the immediate CBD but the interconnecting city fringe as well. That is not to say that businesses outside this precinct should be ignored. There is also a large issue across the city that needs tackling and we hope that other sections of this bill provide that as well. I myself own another business in Rockhampton and have projects across Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and Rockhampton. This certainly is not isolated to the Townsville region.

Over the past number of years we have seen a decline in the standard of what a functional CBD should offer. Many of our members have invested heavily into purchasing, expanding or relocating their businesses into the CBD only to be met with consistent antisocial behaviour which varies from basic vandalism, petty theft, and verbal and physical threats, all the way through to wilful damage and unlawful assaults.

Our members are routinely reporting numerous and consistent antisocial activity, not only in front of their particular businesses but in the general area of the CBD. These include people sleeping or passed out or under the influence of drugs or alcohol in doorways or in the surrounds; verbal arguments between various intoxicated people, yelling and screaming which has then led to physical violence between those people; intentional damage to shopfronts, including broken windows and thefts from businesses; finding faeces or urination stains in or around businesses; workers and other CBD visitors being accosted for money and cigarettes et cetera. The list goes on, but I am sure you are getting the picture.

These incidents create a strong sense of unease and rejection amongst CBD business owners, workers and visitors, making the city feel uninviting and deterring people from spending time there. Many people feel uneasy about visiting the CBD and are worried that the situation could escalate in ways that put them at risk.

Townsville deserves to have a city that is safe, clean and welcoming. Townsville businesses deserve to operate in a city that rewards their investment and their willingness to take risks. Employees deserve to come to work without the fear of being accosted or having their safety threatened. These impacts are broad, with businesses having to invest in additional private security, funding higher insurance costs, adjusting their business hours, having to attempt to retrain and attract new staff or completely leave the CBD area.

I tend to look at this as the overall lens of social decay and modern apathy. This has not arrived dramatically. This has been quietly growing over many years with most people shrugging saying, 'She'll be right' or 'I hope someone does something about that one day,' always relying on it being someone else's job to sort it out. It has been one crack at a time which has turned into years of neglect and walking past the same problems.

There is a theory in urban sociology called 'broken windows', which says visible disorder infers community indifference and invites more disorder. When problems like what we have mentioned continuously go unaddressed we effectively have created our own problem. As the saying goes, the standard you walk past is the standard you accept.

With that being said, there are many people in our business community who have already started to make attempts to start our CBD recovery. The Townsville chamber believes that we should be leading by example in this recovery. Recently, the chamber relocated its office to a street-level tenancy in Flinders Street to indicate our commitment to the CBD and that other businesses should follow. The chamber has also started a committee to revitalise the CBD named 'Uptown Townsville'. It is a collaboration between CBD businesses and the Townsville City Council to bring energy, culture and activity back into the CBD. Our aim is to activate streets, support local traders and businesses, host events and create experiences that bring people into the CBD.

Our belief is that, when there is more activity, patronage and vibrancy, this then provides an active deterrence against antisocial behaviour, thus creating a nicer environment which, in turn, provides a better environment to increase more activity, patronage and vibrancy. The Townsville Chamber of Commerce is fully committed to assisting with any positive changes that removes antisocial behaviour and provides a more inviting business environment in our city.

CHAIR: Thank you for taking the time out of your business to come here to represent your members to the parliament. You might have heard me ask the mayor about how important tourism is to local businesses and to your members. Do you have any comments in relation to the impact of antisocial behaviour on tourists in the CBD and the tourism experience in town?

Mr Booth: Absolutely. We did have a cruise ship here this week, and I happened to be in the office this week. There were many people were walking around. It creates that general unease when you have people yelling up and down the street, carrying on, asking complete strangers for cigarettes or money or things like that. What does that say about our city when people get back on the boat and take off to visit the next city that happens to be completely different? Then they tell their friends and family about what they experienced in that town and whether or not they would return. It is a huge issue. The other problem here is that we have seen a number of shops not open. They choose not to open in these times because they either cannot staff them or it is not worth their time to trade during those times.

Ms FARMER: Kevin, thank you for appearing today and for the work that you do with the chamber. I agree with you: I have always found the Townsville Chamber of Commerce outstanding. I want to go to the point you made about recognising that by moving people on from the CBD does displace them perhaps to other shopping centres which the chamber may represent or to parks or to other public places. Recognising these people are not going to just disappear, what commitment would you like to see from the government that they will attend to those issues? I am in no way criticising the issues you raise about the CBD, but they do have to go somewhere. What do you think needs to happen to address that?

Mr Booth: I certainly agree with what the mayor said before—that the police and other support services need to have the powers to move people on or do whatever they need to do to set that standard. I think this is probably something that we have seen decline over a long time—that is, consistency in the standard we expect in the community. Too often we see people being moved on and then they return the next day or they effectively get to return for something that most of the community would not accept in their own business or family or household. We need to see long-term strategies to ensure that the standards of community expectations are being met and that when someone violates those standards there is some form of consequence, not just a quick, 'Move on and we'll see you again tomorrow.'

Ms FARMER: Chair, could I clarify, and I do not know the names of all of your big shopping centres here: say some of these people go out and basically stay in those places and have the same behaviours, you would like to see enough or at least more police resourcing to deal with problems if they are displaced?

Mr Booth: Absolutely. At the end of the day, we as a business community and business owners do not have the power to move people on. We do not have the power to tackle these issues alone. We do need the resources to help back up our expectation of social coherence.

Mr BAILLIE: Thanks for joining us today, Kevin. I thank the chamber for all of the good work they do to represent local businesses in and around the CBD and across Townsville. You have touched on antisocial behaviour. What impact do you think drug use has had, particularly in more recent times? Are you seeing an increase in drug use in and around the CBD area? What are the outcomes of that?

Mr Booth: It is hard to tell, sometimes, the difference between drug use and intoxication at the end of the day. All a business owner or employees see is someone who is aggressive, abusive, demanding or looking to cause damage. It does not make a huge amount of difference; they just feel uneasy about what is happening. A lot of businesses are having to lock up their shopfronts to ensure random people do not walk in and start doing unsavoury things within their business. They are also having to pay for additional security for themselves or for a group of shops along the street front. Whether it is drugs or alcohol does not make much difference to a business owner if someone is banging on their door and demanding something. That really should not be happening.

Mr BAILLIE: Just to clarify: these new laws are required to provide police with the power to move these people on?

Mr Booth: We welcome any sort of activity. The council has provided roaming security now as well, which is fantastic. Whether it is through council provided security or through police the business community does not mind, as long as something is happening to make sure that staff are safe, premises are safe and we have a clean and welcoming environment to do business in.

Mr BUTCHER: Kevin, under this legislation there are three parts and today you are talking about the DBCP. The other laws that are coming in as part of this include a drug diversion program and new Adult Crime, Adult Time offences. Five previous police commissioners have supported drug diversion, which allows—

CHAIR: Point of order, member for Gladstone: this has been brought up at a couple of committee hearings now. I have had a look at this.

Mr BUTCHER: This is a new town.

CHAIR: Can you back that up? Five police commissioners have backed what? Can you authenticate that preamble?

Ms FARMER: It is in the transcript, Chair, from the hearings into the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act.

CHAIR: Can you substantiate that claim? Five police commissioners have backed what?

Mr BUTCHER: Drug diversion and the program they are running to make sure the police have the ability to do it.

CHAIR: Which five commissioners? Where is this? This has not been substantiated.

Mr BUTCHER: If you are getting into tintacks, Chair, I can change my question.

CHAIR: Member, you can ask the question without that preamble, which cannot be justified.

Ms FARMER: Point of order, Chair: I point out, and I am happy to provide it afterwards, that it is actually in the transcript of a public hearing into the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act when this was introduced.

CHAIR: From whom?

Ms FARMER: From the Queensland parliament.

CHAIR: I am asking you to authenticate the statement.

Mr BUTCHER: I am happy to move on, Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr BUTCHER: Previous commissioners have said that drug diversion puts police resources back on the ground. The new laws that are coming in as part of this bill will hand that back to police so they will have to do more work. Do you believe that more resources need to be on the ground to police this? When these laws come in, we are going to need police on the ground to make sure they have the ability and the people to move these people on if they are doing the wrong thing. Do you think that we need more police here in Townsville to help support this legislation? Are there enough now? What else would you like to see?

Mr Booth: I do not know that I am qualified to speak on what, where or how much resourcing is required. From the business community perspective, whatever these laws are we want to ensure that things are moving in a positive direction to clean up the city image and the environment that we work in. I am no expert in policing, drug diversion or anything like that so I cannot say what or if that is required.

Mr BUTCHER: Crime in Townsville is still a real issue for the people seeing it and feeling it on the streets. As I said, the drug diversion part of this bill will take police resources away. Obviously, businesses in town will continue to struggle if the police are not doing the work in the CBD to remove these people. That is where I was coming from with that question.

Mr Booth: I understand. It is one of those things. Businesses would like to make it a bit easier to have an environment that is cleaner and more welcoming. The average business owner is not a law expert. They are not experts in this field. They just want to ensure that whatever is happening is a positive step and is cleaning up the image that we currently have.

CHAIR: I understand that is not a question you can probably answer, Mr Booth. Thankfully we are seeing a huge increase in police numbers under the government—

Mr BUTCHER: Chair, you do not have to do a preamble either, by the way.

CHAIR: Much has been made about moving a problem from one area to another, if people are excluded. For example, if you are at a Cowboys game at the stadium and you play up then you can be removed from the stadium for disorderly conduct. That is a place-based safety measure. To what extent does the environment in the CBD and the crowds of people who hang around add to the behaviour of the people?

Mr Booth: As we said, one of the reasons the chamber started UpTown was to create a movement of businesses that can create a more positive and clean environment. When the environment is vibrant and active, it really deters people from hanging around. It is like when shopping centres play old-style music, the kids do not hang around because they do not want to listen to it. When the environment is clean, bustling and happening, I am not saying that you are not going to get anything but you do not see anywhere near as much antisocial behaviour because it is not the sort of environment that encourages that sort of behaviour.

CHAIR: Do you support having designated areas where people have the right to feel safe, work safe et cetera?

Mr Booth: Everyone should have the right to feel safe and work safe, regardless of borders on a street or on a map, but we have to start somewhere—that's the thing. When is a good time to plant a tree? It was 15 years ago. When is the second best time? It is right now. I do not think what that mechanism looks like concerns too many as long as something is happening to at least make a start to improve the conditions and the situation that we find ourselves in.

Ms FARMER: Kevin, this precinct model is based on the safe precincts model, which you have probably heard is operating in SEQ. One of the mandatory parts of that is that wraparound services have to be provided. Basically, whatever is causing them to behave the way they do, we all want the problems to be solved. The mandatory provision of wraparound services is not part of what is being proposed for these precincts here. Would you like to see the government committing to that so, in fact, the problems do get solved rather than moved somewhere else?

Mr Booth: Absolutely. At the end of the day, it is not a silver bullet. From the business perspective, we understand this is going to take time, but it has also taken time to get to where we are. We have plenty of members who offer those sorts of services so we would definitely welcome whatever requirements are needed to be put in place. Much as the mayor said earlier, I do not think there is any business owner who is indifferent to the situation a lot of these people find themselves in. At the same time, we need to make sure people who do the right thing and who have spent the money to do the right thing are not adversely affected just because there are people who choose not to follow the rules or choose not to participate in the society that the city wants.

CHAIR: Mr Booth, thank you for your appearance today. That brings to an end the time allocated for your evidence.

Mr Booth: Thank you very much.

LUCAS, Ms Brenda, Program Manager, Yumba-Meta Limited

THANGIAH, Ms Dushy OAM, Chief Executive Officer, Yumba-Meta Limited

CHAIR: Welcome. Can you introduce yourself to the committee and tell us the capacity in which you are appearing today.

Ms Thangiah: My name is Dushy Thangiah. I am the Chief Executive Officer of Yumba-Meta. I have been working in the sector for over 30 years, in the homelessness and public intoxication space. I am representing Yumba-Meta. We work with most of the vulnerable cohort who are going to be impacted by this law.

CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement to the committee and then we will have some questions for you.

Ms Thangiah: Yumba-Meta has been working in the housing and homelessness sector for over 50 years and I have been part of it for 30 years. We manage the diversionary centre where the majority of the clients who are engaging in public intoxication and public nuisance offences are diverted to. It is done through police diversion and also by community patrol picking them up and bringing them over to the diversionary centre, which is a safe place for them to recover. It is overnight accommodation. We have meals, laundry facilities and a clean bed for them to sleep in.

We also manage the Breaking the Cycle program. If participants are willing to make a change, they participate in the program and then move on. We have case management onsite. They can engage in rehab, get their IDs, get their health checks et cetera and then we move them on to supported housing. We then move them on to long-term housing from there. Many people have succeeded through that. I would say that at the moment 27 have gone through that process. In the last quarter, in the Breaking the Cycle program, we were able to return six people back to country.

I am actually talking in support of the police move-on powers. At the moment, we are really struggling to engage with these clients. We cannot force anyone to engage in a program. If there is an opportunity for us through these move-on powers to prevent the clients going back into town, we can engage them in the program and better their life. A lot of them should really be under the Public Trustee or Public Guardian because they just cannot make good decisions for their own life.

We are really struggling because, when the bus leaves in the morning, they are on the bus and they go into town, engaging in antisocial behaviour, drinking. We also feel a lot of the women are being abused by drug dealers and illicit alcohol suppliers. They are constantly under the influence and constantly being assaulted in shelters, back in town and then in prison. It is a really vicious cycle. We have appealed to different governments at different times that whatever is happening now is not working. That is why I invited my colleague as a First Nations person to have a voice. They really do not have a voice in the decision-making process. Whatever is happening is really not good.

CHAIR: Ms Lucas, can you introduce yourself and make a statement as well?

Ms Lucas: My name is Brenda Lucas. I am one of the program managers for Yumba-Meta where I have worked for over 11 years, but I have been working within the sector for over 40 years so a lot of these clients are known to me because of the work that we do within the community itself. As in the statement, part of the community of people who are displaying antisocial behaviour are impacted by substance misuse and alcohol to the point where it does impact on domestic violence that is displayed within the home and then leads to them being back out on the streets as well. As I said, in support of Dushy, it is about supporting those clients to manage their decision based on what their behaviour is doing within the community.

CHAIR: Thank you for coming along today and for providing a voice for the community. Thank you for the wonderful work you do. Much has been made about people being banned from the CBD, for example, or a designated zone and whether wraparound services would be available. Can you outline to the committee how you work with police locally and other agencies to provide that support for people?

Ms Thangiah: Yumba-Meta is not funded to work with people in public spaces, but we do accept people when the services that work with people in public spaces refer them to us. We do not really go into the parks or the centre and bring people in, but we will take anyone who the police or the services bring in. The issue that we have is there is very little engagement with those services for them to bring them in.

CHAIR: In what respect? Engagement with what services?

Ms Thangiah: To be honest, we do not see the services that are supposed to be working with people in public spaces really engaging with those clients. Once they come to the centre, I have to say that we have had quite a lot of success with some of those difficult clients. I think it is the way we engage with them that is something we have to really look at. Something different has to happen.

CHAIR: You do get police referrals?

Ms Thangiah: Yes, a lot.

CHAIR: You would be there for police referrals?

Ms Thangiah: We will accept them 24/7.

CHAIR: If they were issuing a banning notice for somebody they had arrested, for example, they could refer to your service?

Ms Thangiah: Yes, definitely.

CHAIR: Wonderful.

Ms FARMER: Thank you both for the work that you do. Yumba-Meta is well-known for many years of service. I want to ask you the same question I asked Kevin from the Chamber of Commerce. You might be aware of the South East Queensland safe night precincts model this precinct model is based on. A mandatory part is that, while the police have the powers, wraparound services must be provided. This model does not include that. If this model is put in place, would you also like to see that mandatory provision of wraparound services, which of course means funding? All in this room know that the people of Yumba-Meta and many others often do work out of the goodness of their hearts. Would you like to see a real commitment? We want to see the problem actually being solved, not just going somewhere else, don't not?

Ms Thangiah: Definitely. Some part of the legislation must mandate that wraparound services must be put in place, otherwise what are you going to do with the people? You are just going to move the problem from one place to another.

Ms FARMER: Funding obviously has to be part of that?

Ms Thangiah: Yes.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you, Dushy and Brenda, for joining us today. We really appreciate all the work you do to help our community. You have been involved with the antisocial behaviour response group and obviously the police over time. You mentioned the impact that antisocial behaviour has on individuals and you singled out some of the impacts on women who are involved in this cohort as well. Left unchecked, let's say there were no changes, what would be the outcome? Do we need to try something new as a disruption to disperse and as an opportunity for organisations like Yumba-Meta to engage?

Ms Thangiah: I think before, when the police did a lot more diversions, it worked better. When you tell an individual who is addicted to alcohol or any substance at all that they have the free will to do whatever they want, they are going to do that. If we have something like a police power, we can actually discourage them in the morning from going into town and say, 'Look, you'll be brought back again.' Repeatedly if that happens, they will change their mind and eventually start actively engaging in the service. That is what we saw when the power was there before. We had a lot more people engaging in our program actively. Once they are out of that group, they are quite willing to participate and make changes in their lives. A lot of them take a long time, but we do not have a time period for each person—even 18 months or two years. I have to say in my time I have seen many people who were banned from almost all the services in Townsville really work effectively with us, and two of them are actually working for us now.

Mr BUTCHER: Thank you for coming in today and telling us your story. In your opening comments you said that you support the move-on powers, which is part of that statement. If these laws are introduced, more people will be moved on from the CBD and potentially will come to your organisation. We have seen a lot of funding supports from government to non-profits like yourself. Even in today's paper, there is an article about the crime prevention school being in doubt. Do you believe there is enough support financially—and long-term financial support—to make sure you have the right people in place for these new laws if they are introduced?

Ms Thangiah: That is a constant challenge that we have. To be very honest, the diversionary centre has not received any increased funding in the last five or six years. All the other services get a 20 per cent subsidy for increased wages, but we have not been able to get that for the diversionary

centre. It is really hard without good pay to employ good people. There has to be a funding commitment, otherwise it is impossible for us to do this work because we need people. It is really hard work. It is on the front line, working with very difficult people. They cop constant abuse. It is not easy work so they have to be compensated fairly. Without funding, no, absolutely not. We cannot do it.

Mr BUTCHER: Obviously you work in a sector where a whole heap of non-profit organisations support each other. Is it the same story with them? Are they struggling to get funding and a long-term commitment to lock in to get the right people in your organisations to support those people who are going to be sent to you?

Ms Thangiah: All of us, correct—100 per cent.

CHAIR: That is not a recent thing, is it?

Ms Thangiah: But it is actually getting worse because a lot of the people, because of the psychosocial impact, are walking away from the not-for-profit human services work. The workforce that is coming in is just not suited for the work. You have to be really non-judgemental, really compassionate and you have to be really resilient. You have to have a very high level of resilience to work in this sector, and we have just seen that diminishing and diminishing.

CHAIR: Because behaviour is getting worse?

Ms Thangiah: Yes, and drug and alcohol use has really increased that bad behaviour.

CHAIR: I want to go back to some comments you made around getting the bus to the CBD. It is almost like getting a bus to trouble. With these banning notices to designated areas, to what extent does the environment add to bad behaviour? If they are going into an environment where they will play up with friends, drinking et cetera, you commented about being able to remove them from that environment and having the opportunity to help. Would you like to answer that, Brenda?

Ms Lucas: As Dushy stated, providing that support for them on the ground actually allows the people to make better decisions as well because of the fact that a lot of them do not only come with drug and alcohol issues; we are dealing with mental health as well. That has a major impact. We are dealing with that dual diagnosis or other wording around that. Having some guidance and support helps them make decisions because that is what they look for. Once we have built that rapport with the clients, it gives us the opportunity then to really work out the underlying matter for them to still do the drugs and alcohol as well as sleeping rough on the streets.

CHAIR: Can a banning notice be a possible intervention that helps people?

Ms Lucas: It does.

Ms Thangiah: We can give an example of Dale Parker Place. We have 40 one-bedroom units. That is particularly for people who have been rough sleeping and the long-term homeless. We have 24/7 onsite support. At the moment, we have a big problem there with the neighbourhood because the clients are going outside and there is vacant land there. They drink there and throw their bottles into people's backyards. It is actually huge reputational damage for us as well. The difficult part for us is that, once they leave the facility, we have no power to do anything. Especially for Dale Parker Place, I would say the police move-on powers would really help us. They have a home. There is no need for them to gather there 24/7 and engage in antisocial behaviour. Once they come back to the site then we could control those behaviours—we have some way of doing it. At the moment we do not; we do not have the power to do that and that means we are impeding on their human rights.

Ms FARMER: I want to go back to the issue that has been raised a couple of times this morning that, while moving people on will address an issue in the CBD, it will actually displace people to a range of other areas. That means you are going to have to have police there, you are going to have to have services like yourselves and they could be dispersed which makes it hard to cover. Would you like the government commit to doing some modelling so we know what resources we are likely to need in those areas to which people will be displaced so that the problem does not happen there and then you have to react to it? Should there be some kind of modelling that says that we are probably going to need to put more in here, here or here and we are probably going to need to increase it by this much? We want the problem addressed before it actually happens. Would you like to see that modelling done?

Ms Thangiah: Yes, I would agree with you, but I think something needs to be done now because all these things—planning, modelling—take time. There are many women who might even lose their lives because they are constantly assaulted. They come with very serious injuries. If we can start something and then build on that model, that would be really good, but the people who are in that cohort really need some help now.

Mr BAILLIE: We have seen from the crime stats and the report that was released recently a marked increase in drug use across Townsville. Have you seen that with your clients? What is the impact to your organisation and also the community?

Ms Thangiah: About five years ago, I would say we would go into lockdown mode twice a year, but now it is almost once a month that we are going into lockdown mode because the behaviours of some of the people, through whatever they have consumed, are just uncontrollable. Staff go into lockdown mode much more often now compared to what it was about five years ago, I would say.

CHAIR: Can you describe the process of lockdown?

Ms Thangiah: When they get out of control, some of them just—I mean, you just have to watch it to believe me. It is not even like human power. They go trashing and breaking everything. Staff lock themselves up with the clients and then these people just go crazy until the police come. They have damaged all our vehicles, all the windows. They have grabbed the fire hose and sprayed everywhere. No-one can control them. Sometimes it takes three or four policemen to put down one person.

CHAIR: Have you seen increased drug use in the community, Brenda?

Ms Lucas: Most definitely, yes. We deal with it on a day-to-day basis. Dushy talked about Dale Parker Place and the impact there as well. It is a matter of managing those and working with the clients to get them to admit that they do have a problem. A lot of them do not admit that they have a problem; it is just normal to them and that is their everyday life when we are dealing with drugs. It certainly has increased. Even when we drive around, we are seeing the cluster of people in those little groups and some of them are familiar to me, but we are dealing with a lot who are out-of-towners, too. Dushy mentioned returning them to country. That is where, as a support service, we build that rapport. When they come to the diversionary centre, we say, 'Okay, is this the life you want to lead?' and is there a possibility of us organising that wraparound support before we send them back to country? The increase of drug and alcohol use has gotten out of hand for us, too.

CHAIR: Thank you, Brenda and Dushy, for coming along today and giving your perspective of what is happening on the ground. Thank you for the wonderful work you do in the community to address these issues. That brings to an end the time allocated for your evidence today. You go with our thanks.

Ms FARMER: Chair, I would point out there is a protocol of taking turns with questions. The government had a number of consecutive questions in that last period, so could we just make sure the opportunities for questions are even?

CHAIR: Mine was a follow-up, but that is noted.

Ms FARMER: It was a follow-up from the other member.

WHALLEY, Ms Lee-Anne, Service Operations Manager, Althea Projects

CHAIR: I now welcome the representative from Althea Projects. I invite you to make an opening statement to the committee.

Ms Whalley: Firstly, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting. I want to take a few minutes to talk about how homelessness and public intoxication have been responded to locally in Townsville and our role at Althea's Community Hub. We take a health and welfare perspective, not an enforcement one. The community hub operates as a place-based response in the heart of Townsville. It exists because homelessness here is highly visible, it is long-term and it is quite complex. Many of the people we work with are sleeping rough in public spaces. They are living with trauma, mental health challenges, physical health issues and substance dependence. For many of them just day-to-day survival has priority over long-term planning. Our approach recognises that public intoxication and antisocial behaviour are not stand-alone issues. They are often symptoms of homelessness, trauma, poor health and systemic disadvantage. That is why our focus is always on welfare first.

At a very practical level, the hub offers basic foundations that support health and stability, including meals, showers, laundry, a safe place to be during the day and consistent human connection. We believe these are not add-ons—they are the things that make engagement with health care, housing and case management possible. Alongside this, the hub delivers homelessness case management, working with people over time to address identification, income, health needs and housing pathways. We are realistic about the environment we are operating in. There is a severe shortage of housing and people can remain connected to services for long periods without an exit. In these moments our role is about maintaining safety, dignity and connection, even when we know that a housing solution is not immediately available.

One of the most visible parts of our local response is outreach. This is currently delivered through the boots on the ground initiative; however, as an organisation we have been providing outreach since about 2020. Through the boots on the ground initiative, Althea works alongside partners such as Red Cross and the home team to engage with people generally early in the morning in public spaces. The purpose of this outreach is not compliance and it is not displacement; it is about welfare checks, de-escalation, harm reduction and connection back to services that can assist. We are often engaging with people who are intoxicated in public, but the response we provide is grounded in health and support, not punishment. Our staff focus on calming situations, checking on physical and mental wellbeing, and helping people move to safer environments where possible. We are mindful that when responses become solely about moving people on issues do not disappear, they just relocate. This can increase risk, escalate behaviour and ultimately, from where we are, result in police intervention which is often avoidable when earlier health-based responses are available.

The hub also plays an important coordination role locally. Through case management forums and informal collaboration, services share information, reduce duplication and align responses for people with complex needs. This does not solve the housing crisis, but it reduces fragmentation and helps people feel less lost in the system. Despite all of that and despite the local collaboration, we believe there are still significant gaps that remain. We believe Townsville urgently needs more affordable and social housing. Without housing, existing services are working at capacity managing risk rather than resolving homelessness. There is also a clear gap in low-barrier emergency accommodation. Current models that exist are highly restricted and often alcohol focused. What is also needed is a service that is open to anyone experiencing homelessness or crisis—a safe place to shower, eat and sleep overnight—regardless of their intoxication status.

Another gap is the lack of embedded onsite supports at points of access. We are expecting people who are homeless to navigate multiple services, appointments and locations, and that leads to disengagement. We believe that bringing health, housing and support professionals together in one place would increase engagement and reduce drop-off. Importantly for us, the community hub is largely an unfunded space. While case management receives government funding, in terms of the physical environment—the meals we offer, the facilities, the outreach hosting, the visiting services—we rely heavily on volunteers, donations and community partnerships, yet these unfunded elements are often the very things that enable us to engage with people. The hub also hosts a range of visiting health and community services so it brings support to people rather than expecting people to navigate those systems on their own. For many, we believe this is a place where services feel accessible, familiar and safe. What we see locally is that homelessness, public intoxication and community safety are deeply interconnected. Responses centred on enforcement alone miss the opportunity to address the root causes. We believe that health-based, welfare-led responses create better outcomes not just for individuals but for the broader community.

In closing, Althea's Community Hub exists at the intersection of care, coordination and constraint. While homelessness is a systemic issue, our role locally is to ensure that people are not invisible but are supported and safe.

CHAIR: Thank you. Member for Bulimba, noting your comments before, we will go to you first.

Ms FARMER: Lee-Anne, thank you very much for appearing today and also for the work that Althea does. It is a very well-known and highly regarded service organisation in Townsville. I have a number of questions, but the first one I want to ask you is about the services that are available. I think you made a statement that homelessness and antisocial behaviour are not separate entities. It is all mixed up, isn't it? I note from the social housing data that 351 more people have been added to the social housing register in Townsville under the new government. You referred to the fact that there just is not enough housing available in Townsville. Can you comment on that? Would those additional people being added to the register just exacerbate that?

Ms Whalley: I could not comment on the actual data, I am sorry. I do not have that before me.

Ms FARMER: No, but that is publicly available data. I am not asking you to comment on that.

Ms Whalley: We are seeing more and more people. We are seeing more and more people come through our services who are displaced, who are sleeping in cars, who require more assistance on a day-to-day basis. We also administer some emergency relief funding. The demand for that is extremely high. We have to be very selective about how we provide the limited amount of funding we use to people.

CHAIR: You mentioned the need for support rather than enforcement. You would have heard my questions to the previous group about police referrals. If the police intervene and perhaps ban a person from an area, they often have a referral system. Do you get referrals from police? Do you think that a banning notice might be an opportunity for an intervention or to intervene in somebody's behaviour?

Ms Whalley: Because of our location, we work very closely with police. I think we support each other in the role of trying to assist individuals to a better outcome. Unfortunately, sometimes we are also exposed and our staff are exposed to individuals who even we have had to ban just because they may be aggressive.

CHAIR: I guess what I am getting at is that it does not have to be legislated that support be provided. It happens already in terms of police referring people to you et cetera.

Ms Whalley: Yes, but one of the gaps we see is that it would be nice if we were able to have a place where all services were engaged so that when somebody is putting their hand up for help they can get it there and then. When you are asking somebody who is already displaced and who may have health concerns, a week later or even a day later is no good. They need an immediate response. That is what we see and understand.

Mr BUTCHER: As we have heard today, 65 per cent of the people in the CBD are homeless and 35 per cent have a place to go to. I am just trying to get my head around this scenario when this legislation is introduced. Obviously antisocial behaviour is the trigger, not homelessness. By removing somebody from the CBD, obviously they are going to turn up somewhere outside of the CBD. Ideally, they would end up with an organisation. We have heard today about drugs, mental health and social cohesion issues. How are you going to get those type of people who come to your organisation or other non-profits that are trying to cover that and support this?

Ms Whalley: I am sorry, what was the last part of that question?

Mr BUTCHER: The other organisations that you deal with that you talked about collectively are going to have the ability and funding and people to deal with this very tough cohort that is going to be coming their way.

Ms Whalley: I am sorry, what is your question?

Mr BUTCHER: Antisocial behaviour is part of this legislation, not homelessness.

Ms Whalley: Yes, I understand that.

Mr BUTCHER: The 65 per cent of people who are in the CBD who potentially have antisocial behaviour on the back of that will be sent somewhere outside of the CBD, whether that is to get support, by police or someone else or just on their own. Does your organisation and the other non-profits that you deal have the capacity to support that 65 per cent—I think it is over 150-odd people but it could be a bit less—and help those people moving into your area of support?

Ms Whalley: I think we would need to come back together, because we all have existing contracts that deliver to certain areas. We have certain cohorts that we look at, different arrangements, so we would need to come back to the table to understand who is servicing and what the needs are.

Mr BAILLIE: Lee-Anne, thank you for joining us today on behalf of Althea Projects. It is good of you to step up and be here to represent. You mentioned the boots on the ground initiative. Can you expand on that? How long has it been place? What are the benefits of trying to get services to particular cohorts sooner before you see behaviour escalate into violence and antisocial behaviour when it becomes unsafe for you to intervene?

Ms Whalley: I think the initiative commenced back in October-November last year. It has come together with all services that are either in homelessness or supporting vulnerable people. We have people from the outreach mental health teams, we have Red Cross, we have the home team from the Queensland government and we have a huge range of other not-for-profits that support us to deliver on trying to get people engaged where we can. What we face sometimes is the fact that we may have somebody who we are trying to get into rehab but there are no spaces to get them into rehab. That is where we are challenged because we may have somebody at the point of going, 'Yep, I want to be helped,' but we do not have the space to be able to assist them. In fact, Althea, through the government's committee of the boots, has raised a particular case in point which is that these are the challenges that services like ours face on the ground.

Ms FARMER: Lee-Anne, I want to go back to some of the points that you made about where services are provided. You may have heard me asking a question previously about the precinct model being based on safe night precincts in SEQ. A mandatory part of that is the provision of wraparound services that operate together in a way that you are saying is really important and also it is then getting the funding. You referred to the fact that if people are going to be dispersed around the city then you need a realignment of your funding agreement to cater for that. My question is twofold: with this precinct model, would you like to see the government commit to also having the mandatory allocation of wraparound services operating centrally and to see the government also commit to doing some modelling around how services are going need to operate under the new model in the outer suburbs so that we all know what we are getting into while getting certainty that you can be funded for the services that need to be provided?

Ms Whalley: We certainly need certainty to be able to continue. We have always felt that we have operated in connection with people. The beautiful thing about what has happened with boots on the ground is that there has probably been more of a sustained kind of working group. We have had a far greater focus so that is really important for us. What my staff will tell me over time is that groups drop off or people drop off or staff change. One of the challenges that we have when we are working in with community service organisations is that we have to keep bringing people back into the fold. I think we work quite closely with most of the organisations we work with. We can pick up the phone. Our staff have connections around the table consistently. Yes, we need to be able to understand each piece of the pie.

Ms FARMER: You have spoken quite strongly this morning about services needing to operate together at once. That is what the mandatory model actually applies in safe night precincts. That is clearly something that you feel quite strongly about.

Ms Whalley: What we would like to see is a place where services are all there in the one spot so that people do not have to try to negotiate other services. You have health, you have Centrelink—you have whoever these people need operating from one place.

CHAIR: In your opening statement you mentioned that some of the behaviours you have witnessed have led you to having to ban people from your premises. We heard from the Townsville Chamber of Commerce about the angst of businesses around behaviour. Do you think that people who are trying to operate businesses have a right to feel safe and maybe have banning notices for people whose behaviour is violent or threatening, as what you have witnessed has meant a move to banning yourself?

Ms Whalley: We all deserve to feel safe.

CHAIR: Do you believe banning notices are a fair response to that in certain designated areas that are identified as trouble spots?

Ms Whalley: I do not know if I can answer that right now. I do not think I have all the information.

Mr BUTCHER: On the back of what I asked before, ahead of this legislation moving forward, have you actually applied for any extra funding for your business in anticipation of the extra workload you may get in the future?

Ms Whalley: No.

CHAIR: That brings us to the end of the time allocated for your evidence today. We really appreciate you coming along. On behalf of the committee, I thank you again for the wonderful work that you do in the Townsville community. I would like to acknowledge the member for Mundingburra, Janelle Poole, who has just arrived. Welcome, Janelle.

PRRROOF

HERROD, Ms Kate, Retail Manager, Townsville Shopping Centre

TAYLOR-SMITH, Ms Kelly, Centre Manager, Townsville Shopping Centre

CHAIR: I welcome representatives from the Townsville Shopping Centre. I invite you to make an opening statement to the committee.

Ms Taylor-Smith: Chair and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to present as witnesses and to speak here today. We really appreciate it. As previously said, we are from the Townsville Shopping Centre, previously known as Stockland. If you are wondering how the Townsville Shopping Centre fits in, we were acquired by Haben Property Fund in December 2023. After the acquisition, a large number of our centre management team, security and cleaning staff made the transition over. I felt it was important to note that, just to show the experience and exposure that we currently have as property managers.

My main role as centre manager is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of not only my team but also our retailers and customers. I appear here today to share the lived experiences of our customers which we have drawn directly from our customer sentiment surveys. As property managers, we do these surveys twice a year, conducted in March and September. The last ones were in March and September 2025. They were not prompted by this hearing today. They are part of our regular research program.

The question that we asked customers was: why do you feel unsafe? Across both periods, the results are consistent, confronting and somewhat deeply concerning. In March, 37 per cent of customers reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe, while 47 per cent said that they felt safe, meaning that we were already on the verge of splitting the safety perceptions. By the time we got to September, the percentage of customers feeling unsafe or very unsafe had increased to 49 per cent. At this point, only 29 per cent said that they felt safe or very safe. In other words, nearly one in two are now reporting feeling unsafe when visiting our shopping centre. This is not a marginal shift; it is a material deterioration in perceived safety over that six-month period.

Customers are telling us in their own words. We receive more than 100 open text responses in our surveys and the dominant theme is unmistakable. The common language includes 'groups of youth running through the centre', 'intimidating behaviour', 'youth gangs', 'out of control', 'never feel safe especially at night'. Customers repeatedly describe 'large groups congregating' in our entries and at our food courts, bus stops and car parks. For those unfamiliar with our centre, we are flanked by two bus stops, so we have one on either street. There are reports of youth running, swearing, being aggressive or just generally using intimidating behaviour. Then there is the visible theft, fights and fear of escalation. One customer stated that they would never shop there alone and another said that they will not go there on Thursday nights. These are not isolated remarks; these are repeated comments.

Our car parks and transport areas seem to be our highest risk locations. Our shopping centre is 45,000 square metres, give or take, with just under 2,500 car parks, so we have quite a big space. It is no surprise to hear that the car parks, external areas and transport interfaces are where the customers are feeling the least safe. They also describe fear when walking to and from vehicles causing them to feel unsafe, people loitering in car parks and bus stops, feeling targeted when approached if they are there alone, and heightened anxiety in the evenings.

Many customers explicitly distinguish between feeling safer inside the centre than outside. I think that probably comes with light and bright and there is nowhere for anyone to dwell or hide. The impact of the behaviour on the community is that now we are in fear of how this is changing people's perceptions and shopping habits in our centre. We can see customers are avoiding certain days and certainly certain times. Vulnerable and elderly patrons are avoiding coming alone. Some customers come only when absolutely necessary.

We have listed that this is not just a retail issue. We are aware that this is a community-based issue. Also, our shopping centre happens to be across the road from the parole office, from Centrelink and on the same street as a lot of service providers, so the dwelling of people who are responsible for this antisocial behaviour is quite heightened.

The reason we do these surveys is that it gives people a voice. It also gives people who may never get the opportunity to come and speak at something like this a shared voice because they get to vote with their feet every single day. The clear messages from our customers are that perceived safety is deteriorating, youth related antisocial behaviour is the dominant driver, and car parks and transport areas are the most critical risk zones.

In addition to that, because it would not be a shopping centre if we did not have more to add, in September last year we began the demolition of what was known Kingsvale and Sunvale on the landholdings adjacent to the shopping centre. This has resulted in previously uninterrupted antisocial behavioural patterns such as day drinking, rough sleeping, drug taking, urination and defecation now all taking place on and around our shopping centre. We own both sites, but once we removed the place for them to dwell uninterrupted it has now brought it closer to home and obviously closer for our customers to be able to see it on a daily basis. This has even resulted in it spilling over onto the corner of Pope Street where McDonald's is situated. A group of up to 30 or more people are gathering, under the influence of either drugs or alcohol, sleeping or exhibiting intimidating behaviours which, again, is making our visitors as well as our retailers feel unsafe.

Like everyone before us has said this morning, everyone deserves the right to go to work or to shop or to socialise and have that feeling of safety, but currently it is abundantly clear that they do not. The final addition for us is that now our contractors are feeling unsafe working on site at night time because the group of 30 plus that you see during the day is now spilling into our car parks at night. They are now in genuine fear of their safety from that same cohort.

I will close and then Kate will have some feedback to read from our retailers. We welcome this inquiry and strongly support solutions that involve early intervention, visible enforcement, coordinated responses and shared responsibilities between not only the centres of Townsville but also police, transit agencies and government. Thank you again for allowing us this opportunity.

CHAIR: Kate, do you have a short statement to make?

Ms Herrod: Yes. I would like to read a submission from one of our retailers who could not be here today. They have asked that they not be named for fear of any further damage to their business or brand. While this is one written submission from a retailer, I note that the themes, the sentiments and the frustrations raised are the same as those of many of our retailers. This is from a store owner at Townsville Shopping Centre. They employ more than 20 staff, around 75 per cent of whom are under the age of 18. They have chosen not to present this themselves for fear of being further targeted and have asked Haben to speak on their behalf.

Over the past few months, we have experienced multiple incidents that have directly affected our ability to operate safely and confidently. Some of these incidents include: a junior staff member going to the toilet and being verbally assaulted and threatened by a woman who called her derogatory names, threatened to stab her and slice her Achilles heel and claimed to be a serial killer; a staff member being trapped in a toilet cubicle for more than 20 minutes while several people banged on the door, verbally abused her and screamed that they would bash her when she came out—she was so distressed that she had to leave her shift and go home; junior staff being offered drugs, witnessing drug deals and finding drugs and paraphernalia in toilets and walkways; customers being unable to access disabled toilets because groups were locked inside allegedly ingesting drugs or conducting drug deals; having to protect a customer who begged for help while multiple people attempted to assault him; staff being abused and threatened when they refused to open doors to let people into the centre; our store being vandalised; EFTPOS machines being pulled out; people spitting on doors and theft of products on display; driving into the centre each day and being confronted with police, ambulances, open drug abuse, public drinking and rubbish scattered across the sidewalks; and of course the daily occurrence of verbal abuse and fighting within the centre.

These incidents are not isolated. They form a pattern that is becoming increasingly difficult for small business to manage, especially when trying to reassure parents that their children are safe at work. These behaviours have had significant consequences including: severely impacting staff wellbeing, with some now fearful of doing something as simple as going to the toilet; parents losing confidence in allowing their children to work within the centre; foot traffic dropping significantly after incidents occur, particularly when footage or reports circulate on social media; a growing public perception that the centre is unsafe, which directly affects small businesses; loss of sales; increased costs from rostering additional staff so no-one is ever alone; and ongoing operational disruptions.

Our staff are doing their best, but they are not trained or equipped to manage escalating antisocial or criminal behaviour. We have implemented our own measures—ensuring staff carry their phones to the toilets or storeroom, saving security's number in their phones and rostering extra staff for safety—but there is only so much we can do. These measures come at a financial cost and take a toll on staff wellbeing and retention.

Retailers and small businesses are part of the community. We employ local people, support local families and contribute to the local economy, but we cannot continue to operate effectively when safety and security are compromised on a daily basis. We understand there is no miracle solution. What we are asking for is support, accountability and stronger consequences for repeat offenders whose behaviour is impacting businesses and the broader community.

We hope this hearing will lead to clearer consequences for persistent antisocial and criminal behaviour; a stronger police and security presence within and around the centre; improved safety for staff and customers; and a reduction in the burden currently falling on retailers to manage situations beyond our control. We want to be part of a safer, more stable Townsville, one where businesses can thrive and staff feel protected and happy to come to work. Thanks for giving retailers the opportunity to share their experiences. We sincerely hope this hearing is a step forward to meaningful change.

CHAIR: Thank you both for appearing today. You shared some very concerning statistics and personal stories. This bill seeks to introduce banning notices in designated business and community areas. Do you support this measure as an extra tool for police to deal with some of the issues you have described?

Ms Taylor-Smith: Absolutely. There are some retailers from the centre in the room today who have come along to show support, which I am incredibly thankful for as well. Probably the other reason I am sitting up here in front of you is to speak on behalf of us as an entire retail community. I feel the banning notices are potentially helpful, but they also have to be enacted and then followed up on. Haben—Townsville Shopping Centre—has a banning matrix. If we see repeat offenders, the individuals will be banned. If they are found back onsite, they can be charged with trespassing. I am led to believe in the city, however, that they can be issued with move-on notices immediately, and that can be done by either council or QPS members. We would definitely be supportive of something to that effect.

Ms FARMER: Thank you both very much for your thorough preparation, and those stories you have shared are really disturbing. It is great to have the data that you have provided too, Kelly. I do not know if you have seen the submission from the Townsville City Council about where the proposed precinct would be that they would negotiate with the government. It seems to me—and I am not a Townsville person—that the Townsville Shopping Centre is well outside that proposed precinct, but I think council identifies it as a possible future precinct.

We have talked quite a bit today about the fact that if people are moved on from the CBD, or whatever the precinct is, they will have to go somewhere which means they will probably go to neighbouring or outside shopping centres. That suggests to me that your problems may get worse. Even if there is some promise that in the future you will be in the precinct, would you like to see a commitment from the government to deal with your issues now because it seems to me that there is a risk they will be exacerbated quite quickly?

CHAIR: That is a long bow to draw.

Ms FARMER: What commitment would you like to see from the government to address the consequences of that?

Ms Taylor-Smith: I think we need to address it now. I think we need to be the disruptors. I think we need to draw a line in the sand, and our tolerance levels need to be reduced. If everybody gets comfortable with it then everybody tolerates it. We need to be the disruptors to show that this type of behaviour, whether it be from youths or from adults, is not acceptable. I am the voice of the retailers at this point in time. We have over 150 of them doing business under our roof. That is a lot of responsibility to rest on my shoulders, so I need to do everything I possibly can to ensure that they have jobs to come to tomorrow, that their businesses are operational and that we can welcome people from Townsville.

We were speaking about tourism earlier. Tourists are actually one of our customer focus groups. We get them coming in for the football. We get them coming in for the PBR. We have identified that we benefit from short-term stays. We need to make sure that it is inviting so these businesses have every opportunity to succeed. I absolutely think we need to do something about it now. You are exactly right: the problem will not exacerbate if this branches out further.

Mr BAILLIE: Thank you both for joining us today and representing all of the retailers. You mentioned a lot of the issues experienced are caused by youth. Obviously in this bill we are further expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time by taking a tougher stance and introducing more consequences for actions. This is not included in this bill, but in your opinion what impact would raising the criminal age of responsibility have? Would that help resolve the issue or would that hinder the issue?

Ms Herrod: I feel that if the age were raised we would be worse off. The average age that we see could be 10 to 12. If you are looking to increase that further, what is going to happen to these children? Who is going to hold them accountable? Their behaviours are just as unacceptable as those of the older demographic. I would not support that. I think it would exacerbate our issues if you took away any consequences for that lower age group.

CHAIR: That is the Labor policy, yes.

Ms FARMER: Actually, the LNP is in government at the moment.

CHAIR: Thank goodness!

Mr BUTCHER: You both talked about youth running through the shopping centre, being loud and abusing people in toilets. I just want to get your thoughts on this legislation, which supports move-on powers. At the end of the day, the police still have to catch them doing what they are doing before they can move them on. Then they have to try to identify if they are back in your shopping centre at a different time. What happens now in your shopping centre, and what do you think will happen for your shopping centre after this legislation is introduced?

Ms Taylor-Smith: We are very fortunate to have one of the only police beats in a shopping centre in Townsville currently, and I am very thankful for it. Lauren, our beat officer, is probably not as thankful as I am, but I am absolutely thankful. I would like to explain that it starts with youth running through and it escalates from there into malicious damage and assaults. I did not bring the figures with me, but we currently have a number of broken doors and entryways and broken glass from these youths returning to the centre after hours for no apparent reason other than to—

Mr BUTCHER: Cause grief.

Ms Taylor-Smith: Absolutely. When our guards are onsite to assist with identification, the retailers are fantastic in assisting with identification as well. In addition, we have the police beat. If we double down on that and give them move-on powers, our banning notice process would not need to be: we have to get the banning notice, then we have to identify them and then we have to have a parent present. It could be done in the here and now, if deemed necessary by QPS. We are very fortunate to have a beat onsite, which helps our situation.

CHAIR: Thank you for your appearance today. That ends the time allocated for your evidence, unfortunately. Thank you for coming along and speaking on behalf of retailers and your customers.

We now move to the community statements portion of the hearing. We invite people to make short statements of up to four minutes on any aspect of the bill. While we will endeavour to hear from everyone who has registered to participate in this session, the committee is limited by time. We are scheduled to finish at 11.40 am. I encourage everyone to keep their statements concise and to allow those making statements to share their views with the committee uninterrupted.

I remind witnesses that the committee is gathering information and is not investigating individual complaints about people or organisations. Therefore, I ask witnesses to be cautious of providing evidence that names or adversely reflects on a person or an organisation. I will be keeping a timer on the statements. I hate cutting people off, but in fairness to everybody if you start going over the four minutes I will pull you up as politely as I can. I will call each individual to the table by name from the list I have here. I call Suzanne Wales.

WALES, Ms Suzanne, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Sue. Please introduce yourself to the committee and I invite you to make a statement.

Ms Wales: My name is Sue. I am a Townsville local. I have worked in the alcohol and other drug community services here for the past 12 years. Every day I work alongside people navigating substance use, trauma, poverty and contact with the justice system. I understand the intent of this bill, particularly the effort to maintain diversion for first-time, low-risk offences, and that is important. From what I see on the ground, I am concerned that the changes being proposed will have unintended and harmful consequences for the very people who need the most support. Substance use does not follow a straight line. Relapse, instability and disengagement are often part of the process, particularly for people dealing with complex trauma, mental health challenges or unstable housing. A one-strike approach does not reflect that reality. It pushes people into the criminal justice system simply because they did not get it right the first time.

I have worked with people who are trying to engage. They want to do better but they are living day to day. They might not have phones, stable housing or reliable transport. Under this model that person receives a fine or is told to attend a program within strict timeframes. They miss the appointment not because they do not care but because life gets in the way. Suddenly they are no longer someone we are supporting but someone being charged. The shift happens very quickly. Once someone is pulled further into the system it becomes much harder to bring them back into support.

The people I work with often do not lack motivation; they lack capacity. This bill assumes capacity. Furthermore, by casting such a wide net we risk pulling people who are recreational users, people who do not require intervention, and directing them into fines, enforcement pathways or counselling services. This creates a bottleneck, and our service becomes filled with people trying to meet legal requirements rather than clinical need while those in real crisis struggle to access support.

I also want to speak directly about children in the prison environment. In adult prisons, security will always trump therapy. Rigid routines, lockdown and an us versus them mentality creates a constant state of hypervigilance. A brain in survival mode cannot heal. If we transplant that environment onto children, we are not just failing to treat the issue; we are hardwiring their brain for further trauma and further substance use.

Mandatory LED programs in prison often become performance exercises. People participate because they are forced to look good to a board, ticking boxes rather than engaging in genuine recovery. If a child believes that honesty about relapse or cravings will lead to punishment or a longer sentence, they will stop being honest, and there is no clinical progress from that point.

Prisons are prosocial deserts. When we place children in an adult environment they are influenced by older, more experienced individuals and they learn to adapt criminal identities to survive. We are not rehabilitating; we are reinforcing. If we hardwire a 16-year-old for trauma in an adult prison environment, we are not preventing crime; we are increasing the likelihood that a more sophisticated, more entrenched offender returns to our communities. We already see adults struggle to bridge the gap from cell to street. Expecting a child with a developing brain to carry therapeutic gains from that environment back into complex home lives is unrealistic and unsafe.

Finally, these changes are being introduced before we have seen a full evaluation of current diversion programs. That limits our ability to make informed evidence-based decisions. At its core this is about what kind of response works. From where I stand, after 12 years of working in the community and 47 years living here, I can say this clearly: a health-led, flexible and compassionate approach is what creates change. The system assumes that people have capacity to comply. The people I work with often do not, not because they do not want to but because of the circumstances they are living in. If we fail to support them, the consequences do not stop with them. We will all pay the price.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Wales. That brings us to the end of your four minutes. We appreciate you being here today.

GUINEA, Ms Christy, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Christy. Please introduce yourself to the committee and I invite you to make a statement.

Ms Guinea: My name is Christy Guinea. I am a passionate school leader and proud Townsville resident for over 20 years. However, Townsville schools and Townsville community members are facing the same challenges that many cities are facing: finding the answers to engage young people and to make crime unappealing. From my perspective, the answer is and always will be education but education that is offered in all kinds of formats to meet the needs of young people.

Twelve months ago I sat in this seat at a very similar location and spoke about my opinions regarding Adult Crime, Adult Time. At that point I raised my concerns about the long-term implications that this plan could have on young people and their ability to make a change in their lives through education because education provides young people with choices. Failing to provide that is locking young people into a life that will most certainly give them limited opportunities.

During that panel, I was told by the chair that the Staying on Track plan is a 12-month intensive program post-detention release, and it has only been a couple of months. Despite my reservations regarding resources, both financial and human—human is definitely a big resource issue in North Queensland and in Townsville, and you have heard lots of people talk about that today in terms of staffing and funding—I accepted the statement and I watched in anticipation for the programs that would see young people re-engaged in education and turning away from crime. Yet, following this comment, in September last year the Street University closed. It was a program that catered for young people who are not attending school. I know there was a crime prevention school planned for Townsville. Upon reading the newspaper today at 5 am, it seems that it is not going to get a start, despite it being over 12 months since it was promised to our Townsville community. There is a youth justice school planned for Townsville. It does not have a campus in Townsville, but \$40 million has been promised to it.

My concerns have increased in the last 12 months. We have huge waiting lists for our alternative schools in Townsville. They are great. There are programs and groups doing awesome things here in Townsville—Indie schools, Pathways, BUSY schools—so much so that the young people who would most benefit from them are unlikely to be able to secure a spot. Additional to this is the consistent lack of options for most of our young people. For our junior-secondary age—people who are age 11 to 15—there is nothing available for them. As speakers have said today, that 12 to 15 age group is a really big concern that needs to be addressed.

The government promoted Adult Crime, Adult Time and ensured members of our community that this would be done hand in hand with support programs and alternative education programs. However, it does not seem to be the case here in Townsville. I feel we have been left behind. Our young people are being set up to fail. When they make juvenile decisions by committing a crime, they then face adult penalties but all the while without the education, rehabilitation or opportunities that were promised to turn the tide of youth crime. It is a hard pill to swallow as a Townsville resident where the Adult Crime, Adult Time policy got the current government elected but our community is being let down by the programs that were meant to provide a way forward for our young people. Young people in the North were told that they would get Gold Standard Early Intervention, but we appear to be getting gold standard nothing. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you for your contribution.

McDONALD, Ms Kirsty, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Kirsty. Please introduce yourself to the committee and I invite you to make a statement.

Ms McDonald: My name is Kirsty McDonald. I am a multisite manager for Townsville Sunglass Hut. I have shops in two of the major shopping centres here. I would like to speak from a perspective that I feel gets a bit overlooked. It has been spoken a bit about here. It is about crime, jobs and antisocial behaviour. Every day we see the real-world impact of crime driven by addiction and repeat offending. We are finding that goods are not stolen out of necessity; it is most often to fund ongoing drug habits. When the consequence does not outweigh the benefit, this is when we have repeat offenders and the older offenders are teaching the younger offenders. It is a monkey see, monkey do situation.

Also, it is worth noting that the Townsville Correctional Centre houses all of the women from north of Brisbane up to the top of Queensland. Naturally what comes with women are children. This is where we are having these big youth offending situations happening. What it looks like on my shop floor is that I have staff who are scared to come to work. They have anxiety already about starting their shift because they do not know whether they are going to get abused or have violent people coming in. Nine times out of 10 they already know that they are going to get stolen from on their shift. That creates anxiety because they feel like they are not competent at their job. It has nothing to do with them. People's addiction and lives are nothing to do with them but the guilt still lies on my staff.

As the Townsville Shopping Centre representative said, at night, particularly on late-night Thursdays, the shopping centre surroundings can be quite dangerous. We are having to rely on centre security to walk our staff out. How do they do that for over 150 retailers? Banning notices are all well and good, but the problem is that our security do not have the power to enforce. They can say, 'You are banned. Can you please leave the centre?' But they do not have the power to forcibly remove them. You are stuck in a situation where you are then having to wait for police to arrive to forcibly remove these people. Obviously Townsville has a high crime rate as it is, so the police are out doing other things. I am not saying that we take priority but, again, having a police presence locks that in.

Then there are the consequences. We have children who are coming in and the parents are teaching them what to take because they know the children are not going to face the bigger consequences. That revolving door keeps happening. Again, taking a big strong stance on that situation would have a massive impact on all aspects, not only on our youth crime but for our staff and for our community.

We all have the right to go to work and feel safe, especially these young kids. We are bringing up a generation where we want them to work. We want them to feel safe and have confidence in moving ahead in their careers. How can we do that when other youths are abusing them and attacking them? They are too scared to come to work. Then the parents are worried. I have a 10-year-old son. I worry about him in a few years when he goes for his first job. I would not want him working at McDonald's. McDonald's is a great first step. I worked at McDonald's as a kid, but how do I have the confidence that my son can then go to work and not get abused, not have someone attack him, because we see that daily in the centre? Fortunately, we are very lucky to have a police beat at the Townsville Shopping Centre but, again, the police are lacking in numbers and time.

Again, it all comes back to the government. Maybe put it back on P and P—parole and probation. The ladies spoke about this earlier. Make it part of their parole agreement that they need to engage in volunteering weekly or do a hobby or something but make it mandatory because these people are already thinking, 'Stuff it. I have nothing. I can take things. I can do this and that.' We need to be putting these mandatory things in place. Again, parole and probation would be a perfect place for that.

CHAIR: Thank you. That concludes your four minutes. We appreciate your statement to the committee.

SCOTT, Ms Carol, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Carol. Please introduce yourself to the committee and I invite you to make a statement.

Ms Scott: Good morning, Mr Chairman and committee. My name is Carol Scott. I am the secretary for Riverview Apartments on Bowen Road. I am relatively new to Townsville. We arrived in July 2024. I am also 77 so my perspective is probably very different to the former speakers here—but I am an active 77-year-old. When we purchased we thought Townsville was going to be the bee's knees. We came from Bundaberg, so the things that are happening in Townsville regarding drugs et cetera are not dissimilar to what we had heard in Bundaberg, and we have been in many places in Australia.

There is a property next door to our apartment building that assists people, especially Indigenous people, in transitioning, with drug rehabilitation or alcohol rehabilitation. Outside of our property on Bowen Road is the Viles Street bus stop. When we first bought our apartment I thought this was fantastic. We can take our dog down to The Strand and it was a beautifully maintained CBD. We did not have much to do with the CBD area but everything was well looked after. Obviously the council did a fantastic job. What a place to live. That was a bit of an oops.

The Viles Street bus stop continuously of an evening and during the day up until just recently, even with the roadworks, is a gathering place for our alcoholic party, which can start from 7 am and finish at 2 am the following day. We ring the police. That is fine if you continuously ring the police and somebody attends. The Touch Street bus stop, which is probably 100 metres away, not much further, is eternally filled with absolute rubbish, broken bottles—you name it, it is there—plus the same drunk people. Snelham Street leads to the Ross River Parkway. Our property goes from Bowen Road through to Snelham Street. There are 108 units in our property. It is quiet. You would not believe that, because out of 108 units there has to be at least 170 occupants.

It is nothing for me to take my small dog for a walk in the morning in the park, and at 7 am this morning there were already 10 people town there with their water bottles full of yellow water, which I doubt is urine, having their drink or topping up. I have had to put up with defecation in the park and on the walkways; rolls and rolls of toilet paper—I do not know where they get that from; broken glasses, broken bottles; 'you "c"', 'you "eff"', 'this is my country'. I am dealing with people 20 to 50 years old. I am sorry, I am 77: this is my country.

We have had the police. We have had the not-for-profit organisation people coming around. We have had people lying on sofas. The sofas have been burned around them while they have been asleep. Do I worry that when I go into that parkland there is going to be a death? I rang the department of housing because their truck pulled up and it had some mattresses in it. I thought. 'Oh, my God. I hope they're not supplying them all with mattresses.' My concern is not that they are homeless people, because they say they are not—

CHAIR: My apologies, Carol, but we have hit the four-minute mark.

PATEL, Mr Harry, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Harry. Please introduce yourself to the committee and I invite you to make a statement.

Mr Patel: I am Harry Patel. For 18 years I worked in the secure mental health unit at the Townsville Hospital. I have retired. I moved into another house and I was imprisoned in my own house by a criminal who came through a window and put a stopper into my bedroom. I could not get out. It obviously has given me trauma.

I am looking at the laws. It is good for the Premier to have these laws about Adult Crime, Adult Time and rehabilitation. I am interested in rehabilitation, which I have worked in. I want to see where they are rehabilitated, because a lot of these children are 14 and 15 and they are not going to school. Can they read? Can they write? Can they even do a bunch of things? They have no skills. How is the judge relating to these people by giving them punishments that they do not even understand?

With the bail laws they keep reoffending. I see a helicopter nearly every second day or every day. It is very scary for a senior citizen like me or anybody who has been through trauma to look at these helicopters and say, 'There's another person there. I'm not going to go out.' People are imprisoned in their own homes, especially senior citizens. Senior citizens funding is only available to people on pensions. I think that self-funded retirees should be eligible for funding, because it has cost me \$40,000 so far to secure myself and I still do not feel secure. We should have senior citizens funding available to everybody, not just people who have pensions.

The other thing I think is that the courts should be transparent. With Adult Crime, Adult Time, I have seen people getting two years for major crimes. I cannot see how the judge is making this ruling, which should be transparent. The police should also be transparent. My grandsons have had their bikes stolen. The chap produced scissors. That is major crime. That person was about 15 or 16. The police were not transparent. They would not tell us what was going on, what punishment they got, so it has also affected my family. I think these laws are good—they are good laws—but I also think we need another law called 'castle law'. I think castle law is very important because—

CHAIR: I will just pull you up there. That is part of another bill before the parliament now. You will be able to put a submission in on that.

Mr Patel: Yes, but when?

CHAIR: It is before the parliament now. There is an inquiry open on that particular bill.

Mr Patel: Yes, but that could take 20 years. I went to the last inquiry which was when the Labor government was in. I cannot see anything happening from that. I notice that the LNP government is now in and they have put in many laws. Thanks very much for that, but I feel castle law is very important. I should be able to protect my property.

CHAIR: The point I am making is that there is currently an inquiry open into that particular bill you are talking about, so you will get an opportunity to submit on that.

Mr Patel: I hope we get it as soon as possible because it is ridiculous. I do not want anybody to come to my house and I suffer. When they go to jail, they just laugh and have a holiday as rehabilitation.

CHAIR: Thank you. That does conclude your four minutes. I appreciate you appearing before the committee today.

STACK, Mr Craig, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Craig. Please introduce yourself to the committee and I invite you to make a statement.

Mr Stack: I am a senior partner with Knight Frank. We are a commercial real estate agency and we manage shopping centres from Gladstone through to Port Douglas and west to Mount Isa. With other assets, we have more than 400 businesses that we collect rent from and interact with. My representation today is more to advocate across three levels of government to utilise businesses and residents in the community a little bit more as participants with regard to the intent of the legislation.

We have two commercial offices where our staff are accommodated—one in Mackay and one in Townsville, both with street frontages in the city centre. Over the last 20 years we have been able to observe the different behaviours as far as antisocial activity is concerned. Certainly our biggest concern, both for the staff onsite and occasionally staff in our offices, is the impact of drug-impacted people. Certainly there are increased circumstances of mental health and both in Mackay and Townsville city centres there is homelessness, but the drug impacts would be our most significant concern.

My advocacy is to allow residents, businesses and staff within businesses to report and to follow through where they see criminal activity and antisocial behaviour, to acknowledge the report that might come through but also to allow businesspeople and staff, residents and so on, to understand their report has been seen. We know that across all of our shopping centres and so on we are not going to get a police reaction quickly. Our security people may be able to deal with something if they are conveniently on the spot, but the weight of activity, the weight of reporting, the weight of evidence really assists us with our attendance to a matter, our attendance to an individual and our ability to manage circumstances as they develop or as they continue.

KOPITTKE, Mr Michael, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Michael. Please introduce yourself to the committee and I invite you to make a statement.

Mr Kopittke: I have been an investor in the North Queensland region for 30 years. I am a committee member of UpTown Townsville. I want to focus on the fact that I believe the current Adult Crime, Adult Time laws are working. My home insurance renewal just went down \$1,000. Postcode 4814, which is where I live, has gone down \$500 to \$1,000. Postcode 4812 has gone down \$500. My car insurance has gone down. That is relative because of yields. Townsville has had very low yields for investors because we had very high insurance. You will also be very happy to know that the federal government's \$10 billion reinsurance pool is delivering a 40 per cent reduction in insurance in some strata titles.

Chair, you spoke about tourism before. Let's talk about the \$40 billion worth of projects we have. We have Qantas, we have Boeing, we have Idemitsu. I met the two guys from Japan, the lenders. KPMG has predicted 15,000 jobs in Townsville in the next five years. We cannot have a disparity with regard to crime and safety in Townsville versus other parts of Queensland, especially in Brisbane where you have an Olympics build coming up. We have a billion dollars worth of housing approved—\$250 million from Defence. We have just had Defence transfer Apache helicopters here. Boeing has invested \$700 million. We have to make Townsville a safer place for people to choose or we will not get the benefits out of CopperString. I am asking the committee to consider the fact that we have a lot of people arriving here with JCU. They have expectations of a safe environment. We have heard enough about the negatives, but there are a lot of positives. We cannot afford to have disparity in safety in the 13th biggest city in Australia. Do you have any questions?

CHAIR: We do not allow time for questions at this particular point. Thank you for your statement and thanks for coming along.

McDONNELL, Mr Adam, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Adam. Please introduce yourself to the committee and I invite you to make a statement.

Mr McDonnell: Thank you very much for inviting me along today. I received an invite from Adam Baillie's office which I very much appreciate. I am here today as an operations manager for a hospitality group. I am here on behalf of HeyDays Cafe & Events, which is a stone's throw away from Mr Baillie's office. I reached out to Councillor Batkovic a few months ago about some issues we were having with a neighbouring tenancy, which is an old pub that neighbours our venue. I believe it has been vacant for 10 to 12 years and it attracts quite the homelessness crowd, to the point where they have actually moved their own furniture into this building. We had instances where we had extension leads run through fence lines and into external power points in our building and, in one instance, spliced into our exhaust unit on the roof of the building, which is not a space that we would frequent, so to come across that was quite concerning. We do not know how long it had been there. It obviously presented us with safety risks.

I do think that police powers to move people on are a great step forward. If I am being honest, I was probably quite shocked they did not already exist. I am concerned that these people are finding refuge in derelict buildings in our city. I unfortunately think that police moving them on might mean that they are only moved into other vacancies. If housing is not there to move them into, they will find a space to stay. I think it is very sad. They do find a roof over their head, but unfortunately it does come at the expense of safety for the public.

We employ many juniors from 16 through to 22, I would say, who open and close our venue on their own. They have encountered these people in the car park and have been very much made to feel unsafe, which has been echoed a lot here today, so I think that is a general theme. I do know that the security company that is looking after that building at the moment now refuses to enter the building due to their own safety concerns. When I reached out to them most recently they said that they would not enter anymore, that they would simply lock up and leave the venue be and that my best bet was to approach the police. I did and there was not a lot of support there. We were told there would need to be an active crime in place for them to assist us. Unfortunately, it happens overnight and it is not something I witness regularly, so not having the help at that point felt like we were at a point where there was no assistance to help us and help with safety around the venue.

My main concern is property vacancies in the CBD. I do not believe there are any pressures on these people to put tenants into these vacancies, and unfortunately that is resulting in temporary shelters. Personally, that is a large concern of mine. I would love to know if there are any insights into what might be happening with the vacant properties.

CHAIR: With regard to any witnesses who have questions about local matters, there are local members here today. I would encourage you to engage with them after the hearing.

CVETANOVIC, Dr Alex, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Alex Cvetanovic. Please introduce yourself to the committee and I invite you to make a statement.

Mr Cvetanovic: My name is Alex Cvetanovic. I am a chiropractor working in Aitkenvale. I own a medical clinic next to Stockland shopping centre on Nathan Street, right between McDonald's and Masala at the Tom's Tavern front entrance. We provide medical and chiropractic services to over 2,000 patients in our community.

Since the day we signed our lease 3½ years ago, we have had problems. We have been dealing with a raft of antisocial behaviour and criminal activity. We have been dealing with public intoxication, open drug use, theft, public indecency and acts of violence on a daily basis. Our premises are littered with discarded needles, piles of rubbish, people unconscious on our doorstep, vomit, blood and faeces on our doorstep, entrance, footpath and around our buildings. We have even had people having sex in our bushes.

Last month alone, we had the police out there three times in one week. One was for a man injecting drugs on my doorstep at 4 pm on a Thursday afternoon in broad daylight. Another was a man urinating on my shopfront, again during working hours, in front of my patients, a Vietnam veteran and a 70-year-old receptionist. The guy who was injecting was never charged with an offence. The only reason the guy urinating was arrested is because I apprehended him and he gave the police a false name. I am big enough and protective enough to step outside and confront these people, but very much at my own risk. Everyone else is terrified to deal with them. They are brazen, entitled and have less than zero regard for Aussies trying to earn a living and provide for their families.

The burger shop has thefts on a daily basis and so does the petrol station and the Subway. The hairdresser has to lock herself in and cancel her clients when these people turn up. The tavern has drug use in their toilets on a daily basis and on a few occasions when the staff asked these people to leave they have been assaulted. The wall adjacent to the kids' playground is a graveyard of discarded needles and human excrement. The petrol station cannot get anyone willing to work the night shift because it is too dangerous. The McDonald's next to Stockland looks like a post-apocalyptic Third World dump—shopping trolleys full of rubbish and hordes of intoxicated people screaming and fighting every single day of the week.

At our own expense, we have had to remove the bins outside the front because they were getting tipped every night. We had to get all the bushes and shrubs removed and concrete poured to stop the drug use. The owners installed a fence between us and McDonald's at great cost to minimise the undesirable foot traffic.

We have the local police on speed dial and, as helpful as they try to be, for the most part their hands are tied. Legislation gives them very limited power to move these people on. They, too, are frustrated. They informed us that every single one of those people on the street has a home that we the taxpayers pay for, yet they choose to be on the street; they also do not want their behaviour in their own backyard so they bring it to ours. We had to engage a private security company last month—two guys, 24 hours a day. The impact was immediate: no drugs, no rubbish, no crowds, no needles, no crime and no fighting. But at \$20,000 a week—that is over \$1 million a year—that is not feasible for any business to wear just so that we can feel safe at work.

It might sound like venting, but it is not. It is a cry for help and it is a call for action. We really need our local and state governments to step in and put an end to the environment where this behaviour is being fostered. If a pub served me when I was heavily intoxicated, they would face big fines and possibly a loss of licence. Why are BWS and Liquorland around the corner from me allowed to sell copious amounts of booze to these people, fuelling this problem on our doorstep, yet face no consequences? We are the ones who have to wear it. Why are the big corporate outfits like the Shell petrol station next to me allowed to have a policy that allows these people to walk in and just help themselves to whatever they want to and walk out? Their policy is: do not make eye contact. They do not call the police. Do not make eye contact! They are literally sponsoring these people to come and to stay. The reason for antisocial behaviour and how these issues arise are complex.

CHAIR: My apologies, sir, but we have reached the end of your four minutes. In fairness to everyone, I have to cut you off there. Thank you for coming along to the committee today. We appreciate it very much.

LINDLEY, Mr Tim, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Tim Lindley. Please introduce yourself to the committee and I invite you to make a statement.

Mr Lindley: I am Tim Lindley. I am the co-owner of Vigilant Security. Nine of the last 12 months have been spent with boots on the ground—a lovely little term—in the CBD, dealing with all the antisocial behaviour, homelessness—the whole works and jerks. Personally, I have been assaulted three times. Guards have been assaulted. We have been abused, which is normal. Sharps have been thrown at us—all that sort of stuff. That is normal. That is just security nowadays. That is just our day.

Chair, when you talk about tourism, we have been there when tourists come to us and go, 'Hey, where can I find this? Where can I find that? Can I go shopping here?' They cannot find it in the CBD because there are no vendors because no vendors want to stay.

You also mentioned banning notices. Are they effective? One hundred per cent. One person who was a known hard sleeper and a drinking person was banned from the safe night precinct because of a number of breaches he had so he could not come in and buy grog. I saw him at another location and he was happy because he had not drunk in six days and his life was getting better. Fast forward two months and I saw him drunk again—but it does work. These are actions that are in place. I totally agree with the new powers in the bill.

Additional wandering, the locations for that and being able to call on police to do a move-on are all great and wonderful aspects and I totally 100 per cent support them. However, the issue that is going to come up is that we are employed by all these private companies and, as a few guys have mentioned here, people are forking out big dollars for security, for us, to come and do this job. You are going to have an issue with us going, 'Police, police, police, police. Come attend. Come attend.' You do not have the manpower to do that. You definitely will have a retention and a recruitment drive, without a doubt—I have no doubt on that—but you will not have the manpower unless you force people to enlist in the police force. That does not necessarily mean you are going to get your numbers either. There needs to be a full aspect where essentially you need to incorporate and look at private enterprise, security companies, enforcement officers and that sort of stuff.

On the 'boots on the ground' comment that I made, you guys have done that. I have been with them on the ground. I have seen the same companies every morning walking the beat, checking in: 'Hey, look, they're back here. Let's go and have a chat.' We will walk with them, one, because we feel better knowing we are there for their safety and, two, they can then do their job. We educate each other. When I move someone on I say, 'Hey, mate, you can't be drinking here so I need you to move.' We will send them to, say, the diversionary place. We will say, 'Go over here and you're going to get help. Over there, you can't be drinking, mate. You have to move on.' We give them a location, an alternative.

The member for Bulimba mentioned a lot about moving people on and asked where do they go. You are right: I am not a magician; I cannot make them disappear. Vigilant Security has an idea of where they can go and what they can do that incorporates the full deal, but 100 per cent we need to be part of it and—this is understandably lower level where it comes down to the local government—it needs to be endorsed at the state government level so that you can then give the councils local law access so that authorising officers can then enforce the laws you guys are making. It becomes an additional backup for the police. Sure, they are not police; they know that. It is the same as when we issue you with a ticket as an authorising officer; I am not police, I am just acting on certain parts.

CHAIR: Thank you, sir. That is the end of your four minutes. We appreciate that. That is the end of the list I have here. Is there anyone in the room who believed they were on the list? I saw some comings and goings. That, therefore, brings an end to this hearing. I want to thank my fellow committee members, the secretariat and Hansard. Most of all, I thank the people of Townsville for turning out again in droves, as you do, to provide your very important input to the parliament on the laws we bring before you. Thank you to Townsville. I close the hearing.

The committee adjourned at 11.25 am.