

Expanding Adult Time, Adult Crime and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026

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To: The Queensland Parliamentary Committee

From: Hannah Russell on behalf of United Nations Youth Queensland (UNYQ)

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Subject: Submission regarding the Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026

1. Introduction and Stance

UN Youth Queensland (UNYQ), a member of UN Youth Australia (UNY) whilst being governed independently by the UNYQ executive, is a youth for youth education non-profit aimed at educating young Australians on international politics and human rights. The UNYQLD executive welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission regarding the "Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026". The UNYQ executive acknowledges the government's report of a 10.8% reduction in victims of crime per capita in 2025 as a positive sign for community safety (Queensland Government, 2025; Liberal National Party of Queensland, 2026). However, we express concern that the proposed expansion of the "Adult Crime, Adult Time" framework prioritises short-term deterrence over long-term rehabilitation, despite evidence that detention has not reduced youth reoffending.

As an organisation committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), we believe that community safety and the rights of children are not mutually exclusive. True safety is best achieved through a justice system that addresses the root causes of offending rather than one that relies on the "revolving door" of adult-style incarceration for children, particularly when 84–96% of children exiting detention in Queensland reoffend within 12 months (Queensland Family and Child Commission, 2024).

2. Human Rights Incompatibility

It is of significant concern that the Statement of Compatibility explicitly states that this Bill is not compatible with the Human Rights Act 2019 and instead relies on an override declaration under section 175A of the Youth Justice Act 1992. The Bill's reliance on an override declaration signals a willingness to bypass fundamental legal protections recognised in both the Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld) and international youth justice standards.

The Right to Liberty and Security:

The principle that detention should be a "last resort" is undermined by expanding mandatory adult-style sentencing.

Protection of Children in the Criminal Process:

By reducing restorative justice options for these serious offences ensures that the Bill discards some of the most effective tools for juvenile rehabilitation.

Equality and Non-Discrimination:

The expansion of police powers in Designated Business and Community Precincts (DBCPs), including scanning and “move-on” directions without cause, creates a framework where young people are inherently viewed as suspects rather than citizens, with First Nations and marginalised youth most at risk of over-policing.

3. Incarceration vs. Recidivism

While the government cites a decrease in victim numbers, other data points suggest the youth justice system is reaching a breaking point. As of early 2025, on average 314 children spent the night in a detention centre, whilst 84% of these children were unsentenced. Compared to adults with only 39% (Queensland Family and Child Commission, 2025; NITV, 2025).

Approximately 84% to 96% of young people released from detention in Queensland reoffend within 12 months, indicating that detention is not functioning as an effective deterrent and may in fact strengthen cycles of offending by removing children from education, family and social supports (Queensland Family and Child Commission, 2024). This demonstrates that existing approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration are failing to prevent further crime (Queensland Family and Child Commission, 2024).

4. Systematic Inequality and First Nations Overrepresentation

The UNYQ executive is deeply concerned that these laws will exacerbate existing systemic biases. Data from the past year show that the “Adult Crime, Adult Time” framework has disproportionately affected First Nations youth. In early 2025, around 70% of children in Queensland youth detention were First Nations, despite First Nations children representing a much smaller proportion of the youth population (NITV, 2025; ANTaR Queensland, n.d.).

Our members and the wider community indicate that broad police discretion in public spaces often leads to the targeting of marginalised youth. The expansion of DBCPs grants police the power to stop and scan children in the “absence of any reason,” which risks further straining the relationship between youth and law enforcement and deepening mistrust among First Nations communities.

5. The Financial Burden of the IDEDF

The introduction of Penalty Infringement Notices (PINs) of approximately \$500.70 for minor drug offences creates a “fine trap” for vulnerable youth (Queensland Government, 2026). With 72.9% of youth under justice supervision already identified as living in significant hardship, these fines are more likely to result in debt cycles and State Penalties Enforcement Registry (SPER) enforcement rather than health-based recovery, especially for First Nations and low-income families (Queensland Family and Child Commission, 2025)

6. Recommendations

- Withdraw the override declaration and ensure all youth justice legislation is fully compatible with the Human Rights Act 2019 and with international standards that require detention to be a measure of last resort
- Remove mandatory minimums (such as the 15-year non-parole period) to allow judges to consider a child's developmental stage, trauma history and prospects for rehabilitation, consistent with youth justice principles and human rights obligations
- Implement strict monitoring and transparent reporting of police powers in designated precincts to ensure they are not used to unfairly target young people or marginalised groups, with specific focus on the impact on First Nations youth
- Consult youth mental health experts, First Nations leaders and young people with lived experience of the youth justice system in designing alternative, and community-based responses to youth offending

7. Conclusion

The UNYQ executive stands for a Queensland where all children have the opportunity to learn and grow as they navigate the hurdles of growing up. While we share the goal of a safer community, we believe that true safety is found in equity, education and rehabilitation, not in the expansion of laws that the government itself admits are incompatible with human rights and which evidence shows are failing to reduce reoffending or address overrepresentation. We would like to reaffirm the efforts made by the Queensland Parliament and offer suggestions from a youth perspective that may not have been heard.

Respectfully submitted,

Hannah Russell

On behalf of UN Youth Queensland executive

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