

Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024

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Submission to the Queensland Parliament Regarding The Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 Dear Members of Parliament, I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the proposed mandatory sentencing laws in Queensland, particularly their application to children as young as 10 years old for serious crimes. I believe these laws are not only unjust but also counterproductive in addressing the root causes of crime and in promoting the long-term safety and wellbeing of our communities. As a mother of four, I am committed to a safe Queensland for my family. However, I strongly believe that the answer to crime and safety does not lie in punitive measures that fail to account for the social and developmental factors that contribute to criminal behaviour.

1. Cognitive Development and Age Appropriateness of Mandatory Sentencing: Children under the age of 14, especially those as young as 10, are still in critical stages of emotional and cognitive development. Scientific evidence shows that children's impulse control, decision-making abilities, and understanding of consequences are not fully developed until their late teens. Mandatory sentencing laws that impose adult-like penalties on children completely ignore these developmental realities. Young people are often influenced by a variety of complex factors, such as poverty, family dysfunction, trauma, and limited access to education or mental health support. These factors can contribute to behaviours that lead to criminal activity. Treating children in the same way as adults in the justice system is not only inhumane, it also disregards expert advice from child development specialists, psychologists, and criminologists who strongly recommend rehabilitative rather than punitive approaches for young offenders.

2. Disproportionate Impact on Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Groups: Mandatory sentencing laws disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, particularly Indigenous children and children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. These groups are already at a greater risk of falling into the justice system, and mandatory sentencing simply perpetuates the cycle of disadvantage without addressing the root causes. Instead of focusing on rehabilitation and early intervention, these laws punish children without providing the necessary resources or systemic change that could prevent crime in the first place. This approach not only fails to break the cycles that contribute to criminal behaviour but also neglects the social causes of crime, such as inadequate education, poverty, and the breakdown of families. If we are to address the problem of youth crime effectively, we need to focus on these systemic issues, rather than placing blame solely on the individuals who are most vulnerable.

3. A Call for Holistic Solutions: Rather than relying on mandatory sentencing, I urge the Queensland Government to invest in measures that address the social and economic factors that contribute to youth crime. This includes investing in education, mental health services, early intervention programs, and family support services, as well as addressing poverty and systemic inequality. By tackling the root causes of crime, we can create safer communities and prevent young people from entering the justice system in the first place.

4. Making Queensland Safer – Addressing Domestic Violence and gender based violence While the proposed changes in the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 primarily focus on the actions of children, it is crucial that the conduct of adults, particularly in relation to domestic violence and violence against women, also be addressed. Domestic violence is a pervasive issue, overwhelmingly perpetrated by adults, not children. Unfortunately, this bill does not adequately address this significant concern. Too many women in Queensland continue to live in fear of domestic and gender-based violence. In order to truly make Queensland safer, the focus must shift towards addressing the root causes of violence against women, strengthening prevention strategies, and ensuring stronger support systems for victims.

5. The Need for Adequate Engagement and Scrutiny in the Legislative Process: As Queensland does not have a Senate, it is

even more critical that the legislative process be robust and allow for adequate scrutiny. It is deeply concerning that such significant legislation, particularly that which impacts vulnerable children, does not undergo the necessary level of public consultation and engagement. The standard 6-week engagement period is an important mechanism for ensuring that all voices, especially those of experts, affected communities, and concerned citizens, are heard. It is disappointing that legislation which has such far-reaching consequences for children and disadvantaged groups is not given the attention it deserves. The failure to engage in proper consultation and allow for adequate time to consider expert advice and public input is a failure of due diligence, and it undermines the democratic process. This rushed approach does not foster the transparency or accountability that Queenslanders expect from their Government, especially on matters of justice and human rights.

Conclusion: As a concerned mother and a citizen of Queensland, I am asking that the Queensland Government reconsider the current mandatory sentencing laws for children. I urge you to prioritize policies that address the underlying social causes of crime, invest in rehabilitation and support services, and create a justice system that is both fair and developmentally appropriate for children and young people. Additionally, I call on the Government to take stronger action to prevent and address domestic violence and violence against women. Queensland deserves a justice system that promotes safety, fairness, and the long-term well-being of all its citizens. Furthermore, I urge the Government to ensure that legislative changes of this magnitude undergo the necessary consultation, engagement, and scrutiny to guarantee informed, fair, and just outcomes. Thank you for your attention to these crucial matters.