

Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024

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Committee Secretariat
Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
Via email: JICSC@parliament.qld.gov.au

3 December 2024

Re: Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024

Dear Committee Secretariat

We welcome the opportunity to provide this submission to the *Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024* Inquiry.

The Townsville Amnesty International Action Group strives to safeguard the human rights of all people in our community. Our monthly newsletter goes out to more than 500 people in the Townsville region and Indigenous Youth Justice is one of the issues that we have been involved in over many years. We wish to express our grave concern that the *Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024* will not make our community safer and is not consistent with Queensland's human rights obligations to children.

We are alarmed both by the introduction of adult sentencing for serious offences by children, and the removal of both detention as a last resort and the principle that non-custodial sentences are better for children. These changes ignore concrete evidence that more time spent in custody increases the likelihood of re-offending¹.

The blatant disregard of human rights is extremely concerning. Attorney-General, Deb Frecklington acknowledges incompatibility of the bill with both the *QLD Human Rights Act 2019* and the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. She states the amendments mean more children will end up in detention and spend longer there².

¹ Walsh, Tamara, Beilby, Jane, Lim, Phylcia, and Cornwell, Lucy (2023), Safety through support: building safer communities by supporting vulnerable children in Queensland's youth justice system, Brisbane, QLD Australia: The University of Queensland, <https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:55d7b70>

² The State of Queensland (2024), Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 Statement of Compatibility, <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/bills/2024/3232/Making-Queensland-Safer-Bill-2024---Statement-of-Compatibility-c348.pdf>

72% of Queensland children in youth detention are First Nations. More than a third of children imprisoned in Queensland have been living in unstable or unsuitable housing. More than half have been impacted by domestic and family violence. Almost all come from low socioeconomic households³.

As such, we believe this bill will cause more harm to vulnerable Queenslanders including children as young as 10 years old, and ultimately to the whole Queensland community.

We fully support Amnesty International Australia's call for a justice reinvestment approach to managing public resources where money is redirected from prisons to community-based initiatives.

Instead of harmful punitive approaches, justice reinvestment is evidence-based. It embraces therapeutic and rehabilitative methods like diversion programs that address the underlying causes of problematic behaviour in children.⁴

Diversion programs and services like this already exist in Townsville and other parts of Australia – and they're incredibly successful. Some local examples are:

- Johnathan Thurston Academy, Townsville
- The Lighthouse: youth after hours diversionary service provided by Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service
- The Street University (TSU) Townsville
- Townsville Flexible School operated by the Edmund Rice Foundation

Such programs achieve long-term reduction in youth offending while costing Australians much less than the \$1 million it costs on average to incarcerate a child per year⁵ or to build new youth detention centres (\$627.61 million⁶ for the new Woodford facility⁶).

We call on the Queensland Government to rethink rushing through the *Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024* and instead develop solutions which will address the multi-faceted root causes of serious youth offending to build safe and thriving communities.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Hanley

Co-convenor, Townsville Amnesty International Action Group

³ Amnesty International Australia (2024), Petition: QLD - Kids Don't Belong in Prison Cells, <https://action.amnesty.org.au/act-now/qld-kids-dont-belong-in-prison-cells>

⁴ Amnesty International Australia (2024), QLD Election Toolkit <https://www.amnesty.org.au/campaigns/indigenous-justice/>

⁵ Amnesty International Australia (2024), Justice Reinvestment Flyer, <https://www.amnesty.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/QLD-FLYER-justice-reinvestment-FOCUS.pdf>

⁶ QLD Government (2024), Media Statement: Construction starts on youth detention facility at Woodford, <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/99792>