

Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024

Submission No: 107
Submitted by: Yoora Maltha
Publication: Making the submission and your name public
Attachments: See attachment
Submitter Comments:

Yoora Maltha Submission to the Queensland Parliament Committees Inquiry into the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024

ABOUT YOORA MALTHA

Yoora Maltha, meaning "You All Strong" in Ghungalu and Kalkutungu language, was founded by four deadly young people under 30 years old:

- **Manny Williams:** A proud Kalkutungu, Pitta Pitta man with Thai heritage from Mount Isa, with family connections to Bundjalung and Mayi-Thakurti Country.
- **Seleena Blackley:** A proud Kalkutungu, Waanyi, and Torres Strait Islander woman with deep connections to Mount Isa, the Gulf of Carpentaria, and Kubin Village on Moa Island.
- **Koby Sellings:** A proud Gunai Kurnai man from Lakes Entrance, with connections to Yuin and Wotjobaluk countries.
- **Zhanae Dodd:** A proud Ghungalu, Wadja (Woorabinda), Birri, Widi/Wirri, and Kaanju woman with deep ties to Darumbal Country and people.

"Yoora Maltha is a transformative political movement rooted in advocacy, lobbying, and accountability. As a custodian collective, we listen deeply to stories and struggles, amplifying the voices of communities and advocating for equity, justice, and sustainable reforms. Our collective envisions stronger communities, stronger families, and a thriving youth generation anchored in cultural practices and Indigenous leadership"

OUR POSITION ON THE MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL 2024

This bill disproportionately affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who already face significant disadvantages in the youth justice system. With Indigenous children representing 61% of youth in detention but only 8% of Queensland's youth population [10] [11], harsher punitive measures will exacerbate systemic inequities and perpetuate cycles of incarceration.

Why Punitive Approaches Fail

- **Recidivism Rates:** Research shows that 88% of young offenders reoffend within 12 months of release, especially when subjected to punitive measures that fail to address underlying causes [12].
- **Impact of Trauma:** Indigenous youth are disproportionately affected by intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, and socio-economic barriers. Incarceration intensifies these factors, disconnecting them from their families and communities [11] [12].

- **Evidence-Based Solutions:** Programs centered on cultural reconnection, education, and holistic support significantly reduce reoffending and foster resilience among Indigenous youth [10] [12] .

OUR LIVED EXPERIENCE AND ADVOCACY

We have firsthand and very real experience working with and advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and at risk youth across Queensland. Here are some stories that reflect the broken system:

1. **Rockhampton:** During a police street check of minors, Zhanae arrived to support the young people in her Aboriginal designed uniform and was met with immediate judgement. Despite explaining her role, she faced hostility from officers. The children, traumatised and upset, were at risk of escalating charges such as public nuisance or wilful damage and police kept pushing despite intervention from Zhanae.
2. **Townsville:** In one harrowing case, we witnessed the justice system being weaponised against a vulnerable 14-year-old girl with an undiagnosed acquired brain injury, functioning at the developmental level of a three-year-old. This young girl had been in and out of child safety services, repeatedly self-placing in unsafe environments because the system failed to provide her with proper care. Frustrated by her behaviour, child safety turned to the police, who were instructed to pick her up for a minor public nuisance offense. This girl was then sent to the Townsville Youth Detention Centre, where her suffering deepened. Locked away on remand, she endured rolling lockdowns, often confined to her cell for 23 hours a day. In the unsanitary conditions of detention, she contracted scabies and was left in filth after flooding her cell in distress. Requests from the only two Indigenous workers advocating for her care for medical assessments were repeatedly ignored. It wasn't until later—after relentless advocacy—that a proper scan was conducted, revealing her brain injury. This story exemplifies how child safety used the justice system as a babysitter rather than addressing the root issues. It also highlights the systemic neglect and dehumanising conditions faced by children in detention. This is why culturally safe, community-led alternatives are essential to ensure vulnerable children like her are supported rather than criminalised.

These examples highlight systemic failures and the urgent need for alternatives to incarceration.

WHAT WORKS FOR MOB

- **Cultural Engagement:** Research from Western Australia shows that restorative justice programs designed with Elders reduce reoffending by addressing the harm caused and rebuilding relationships [11] [12] .
- **Holistic Approaches:** Programs that incorporate cultural practices, mentoring, and community support foster identity and resilience, effectively diverting youth from the justice system [10] [11] .

- **Prevention Over Punishment:** Raising the age of criminal responsibility and investing in community-led initiatives offer long-term solutions that address root causes of offending.

Key Recommendations

1. **Raise the Age of Criminal Responsibility:** Align with global standards to protect children from entering the justice system too early.
2. **Expand Restorative Justice:** Invest in culturally safe, rehabilitative programs that empower communities to lead change.
3. **Address Social Determinants:** Tackle housing, education, and health disparities to prevent youth from entering the system.

QUOTES FROM OUR FOUNDERS

- **Koby Sellings:**
“Allowing harsher punitive punishments will prove ineffective because such measures fail to address the root causes of youth offending and can actually exacerbate the problem. Imprisoning young people at an earlier age or for longer periods of time does not provide them with the necessary support to change their behaviour. Instead, it can create a cycle where young offenders become more entrenched in criminal activity, as they form relationships and adapt to a life inside detention, seeing prison more as a ‘safety net’. At the age of 10, I made lifelong friendships that have had a positive impact on my life, and locking children away at such a formative time only limits their potential for healthy relationships and personal growth. Rather than punitive measures, we should focus on rehabilitative programs that address the underlying issues such as trauma, education gaps, and social inequality. Working with young people to understand and address these factors, rather than punishing them more harshly, is a far more effective way to reduce recidivism and help them reintegrate into society in a meaningful way.”
- **Zhanae Dodd:**
“We know that punitive punishment doesn’t work—we’ve worked in these systems and seen the impact. The reality is it only creates cycles. Our kids are left with mistakes that will follow them for the rest of their lives, with little to no chance for rehabilitation. Removing restorative justice from the table for these 13 crimes does nothing but push our young people even deeper into systems designed to fail them. It strips away their opportunity for healing and connection to culture, further entrenching them in the system. I ask the LNP government, Mr Crisafulli, and the Minister for Youth Justice to come into our communities and see what works. But you don’t want to do that. On the day you passed the amendments to the Youth Justice Bill and repealed treaty, you had over 40 young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Parliament, yet you didn’t come anywhere near us. Fiona Simpson was the only exception, but even she preached reconciliation to us after you passed two bills that set us back, oppressed us, and unfairly policed our people. When I asked the Member for Cook the same day how the LNP plans to address the mistrust between our communities and the government, he rejected the idea that there even was any mistrust. This is the disconnection we are

dealing with—policies that are made without consultation, without understanding, and without the will to make genuine, lasting change. These people are out of touch, and it's clear they don't have our people's best interests at heart. We need leadership that listens, that is willing to step into our communities and truly understand what works. Otherwise, this so-called reconciliation will remain nothing but an empty word."

- **Manny Williams:**

"Young people need love and connection, not locked in detention. I've worked in youth bail support, on country programs, after hours youth support, and I've seen when a young person feels safe and heard in community, they gain a stronger sense of connection to who they are and their place in the world. When they're isolated, they start to disconnect themselves from the people who care for them, their community, their culture and themselves. Which further harms their social and emotional wellbeing and their spirit. These new laws will only cause more damage to our young people, but communities as well, as this targets a whole generation of young people who could aspire to become our teachers, our lawyers, our leaders and much more in the future."

- **Seleena Blackley:**

"For such a long time, modern Australia has overlooked the longstanding connection that First Nations peoples have had to Country and Culture. Due to the irreparable damage done during first contact, many First Nations peoples have been displaced and disconnected. We as First Nations peoples don't want to see history repeated, and yet we are now seeing more disconnection and displacement happening. Our children don't need punitive punishment, they need and deserve the opportunity to connect and heal, so our next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can thrive"

Yoorra Maltha stands firmly against the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 in its current form. We urge Parliament to invest in culturally safe, community-led solutions that honor the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Together, we can create a justice system that is fair, rehabilitative, and truly makes Queensland safer for all.

For further comment, support or information please contact us all on yooramaltha@gmail.com



REFERENCES

1. "The impact of Indigenous cultural identity and cultural engagement on violent offending" – Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse, [link](#) [10] .
2. "New approach to Aboriginal restorative justice helps reduce reoffending" – University of Western Australia, [link](#) [12] .
3. Griffith University repository on cultural justice strategies, [link](#) [11] .