

Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024

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Submitted by: Professor Jason Payne and Associate Professor Danielle Harris,
Griffith Criminology Institute
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Mr Martin Hunt
Chair, Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee
Queensland Parliament**Re: Inquiry into Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024**

Dear Chair,

We thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024. We offer this submission in our capacities as the Head of the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice (CCJ) and Acting-Director of the Griffith Criminology Institute (GCI).

Legislative aims

As stated, the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 will amend the Youth Justice Act 1992 to achieve the following aims (among others):

- introduce ‘adult crime, adult time’;
- remove the principle of detention as a last resort and that a non-custodial order is better than detention in promoting a child’s ability to reintegrate into the community;
- ensure a child’s criminal history reflects their full history;
- enable a person’s child criminal history to be admitted when sentenced as an adult;
- alter the process relating to the transfer of 18-year-old detainees from youth detention centres to adult correctional centres.

It is our view that none of these changes are evidence-based, nor is there any empirical evidence to suggest that these changes will (as intended) reduce youth crime, prevent serious repeat youth offending, or improve community safety overall. To the contrary, the overwhelming majority of scholarly research findings in this area points to the likelihood that these more punitive measures will cause additional harm and exacerbate criminal offending over the longer term. Further, the unintended consequences of this proposal (such as net widening) will place undue burden on the limited and finite resources of an already stretched justice system.

Of the various new programs proposed, several appear to exhibit the hallmark traits of Queensland’s previous “bootcamp” style intervention programs. Like their international counterparts, these types of programs have largely failed to meet crime reduction and crime prevention objectives. This is because, in the longer term, increasingly punitive responses that dislocate young people from their families and communities and that do not address the vulnerabilities in these environments instead intensify overall recidivism risks and criminogenic needs.

Under the scholarly leadership of Professor Ross Homel, the Griffith Criminology Institute has long advocated for early intervention as the best form of crime prevention with youth offender populations. Indeed, the most recent evaluation of the Pathways to Prevention Program in Queensland (and the winner of this year's Australian Violence and Crime Prevention Awards) has demonstrated considerable long-term benefits of early intervention for at-risk youth. It is promising to see the Bill accompanied by a \$100M investment in "Gold Standard Early Intervention" because credible government investment in reducing youth crime should have at its core an emphasis on evidence-based early-intervention and prevention programs.

Expand and invest in existing evidence-based programs

The current legislative package offers a suite of new programs and initiatives targeted at addressing youth crime in Queensland. This package has been crafted to signal a step-change in the political response to youth crime, favouring 'new initiatives' over existing evidence-based programs and practices. Our recommendation is that the Committee investigate options to evaluate, enhance or expand existing, evidence-based programs that have a proven capability to deliver strong outcomes in youth justice throughout Queensland.

These proposals signal a political response to a perceived crisis of youth crime, however, current long term data trends (i.e., as documented in reports produced by the Queensland Government Statistician's Office [QGSO]) confirm that crimes perpetrated by youth have declined significantly and steadily over the last decade. This would suggest that some existing approaches to youth crime in Queensland are effective in reducing serious recidivism and enhancing community safety. To further strengthen the effectiveness of these approaches, we recommend a greater investment in identifying and evaluating those specific mechanisms of positive change that feature in existing approaches. In other words, some current evidence-based approaches within the state are demonstrating efficacy in reducing serious interpersonal crimes committed by youth. The Griffith Youth Forensic Service (GYFS) is one such example. GYFS has operated with continuous government funding since 2001 and is a partnership between Griffith University and the Queensland Government (Youth Justice). GYFS is a state-wide service that delivers field-based, individualised, specialist services, including evidence-based assessment and treatment for young people found guilty of serious sexual offences. Since its inception, GYFS has performed more than 900 assessments and treated more than 400 adolescents. The GYFS clinical model has demonstrated success in reducing sexual reoffending based on rigorous evaluation. External evaluation has recognised the GYFS clinical model as a gold-standard approach to reducing sexual harm in adolescents and has received considerable interstate interest from jurisdictions including Tasmania, and the Northern Territory. Most recently, the GYFS model has been adapted by the National Directorate of Health for use with young forensic patients in Norway.

Importantly, the GYFS clinical model is adaptable. It has potential to be expanded beyond its current focus on harmful sexual behaviour to address serious violence as well. To achieve this will require detailed consultation, comprehensive project planning and an expansion to the GYFS clinical team. Importantly, the foundations of expertise and success already exist.

More information about GYFS can be found at the GYFS website:

<https://www.griffith.edu.au/criminology-institute/griffith-youth-forensic-service>

Should the committee require additional information or briefings, please contact the Director of the Griffith Criminology Institute at gci-enquiry@griffith.edu.au

A legislative foundation for evaluation

Notwithstanding our comments above, it is imperative that any legislative changes be closely monitored closely and independently evaluated independently. Further, there should be a commitment to making the outcomes of these evaluations' public. We would refer the

Committee to the legislation establishing Queensland's 15 Safe Night Precincts as a model that embeds triennial evaluation as a legislative requirement.

Equally important is evaluation planning and funding. Indeed, the most informative evaluations are those that are planned well in advance (often before implementation), supported by a strong program logic and theory of change model, and complemented by an evaluation strategy that ensures that critical data collection and document perseverance is implemented early.

Developing a data strategy

To support monitoring and evaluation of the proposed legislative changes, we recommend that the Bill be accompanied by a clear strategy for the collation of, and independent reporting on, criminal justice data across Queensland. Queensland is already in a unique position to achieve these goals through the Social Analytics Lab (SAL) which currently holds secure data storage approval for several Queensland criminal justice system datasets.

In brief, Griffith University is home to Queensland's only secure data storage facility accessible to researchers from any institution and designed to house sensitive data on crime and criminal justice system activities. SAL was forged as a partnership between Griffith University and the Queensland Police Service (QPS), Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) and the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (QGSO). At present, SAL is home to de-identified data from the QPS QPRIME database, the QCS Offender Management System, as well as a comprehensive data linkage asset developed by QGSO, known as the Queensland Cross-Sector Research Collaboration (QCRC). This unique data-sharing agreement has facilitated many of Queensland's most comprehensive quantitative data analysis projects and has been used to support a range of programs and initiatives.

Importantly, there is considerable scope to expand the utility of SAL to support the Queensland Government's criminal justice policy and program objectives. For example, SAL could be used to house/archive data from the Department of Youth Justice and Victim Support and the Queensland Courts. Further, support for the development of data linkage keys and protocols (for linking between datasets and facilitating longitudinal analysis) could substantially increase the utility of SAL for future program evaluation activities.

More information about SAL can be found at:

<https://www.griffith.edu.au/criminology-institute/our-institute/social-analytics-lab>

Should the committee require additional information or briefings about the SAL, please contact the Director of the Griffith Criminology Institute at gci-enquiry@griffith.edu.au

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and welcome any opportunity to discuss these matters in more detail.

Sincerely,

Jason Payne
A/g Head of School, Criminology and Criminal Justice

Danielle Harris
A/g Director, Griffith Criminology Institute