

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

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

As a member of Amnesty International Australia striving to safeguard the human rights of all people in our community and as a constituent of Gaven, I wish to express my 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.

I have already written to my local Member, Ms Megan Scanlon, with regards to her government passing legislation to allow the indefinite detention of children in police watch houses and adult correctional facilities, and I see this legislation as just another step in a series of knee jerk reactions to a popular "get tough on crime" mantra by both sides of politics.

I have a 30 year old son who, when he was a minor, got himself into trouble with the law. He was charged with around 10 crimes that involve mainly stealing but also entering a property to commit an offence. He was not charged as an adult and so spent no time in detention. I am so grateful for this. His was a problem of self loathing and after some counselling and a lot of work with me, he now has a steady job and has no inclination to reoffend.

The introduction of adult sentencing for serious offences by children, and removal of both detention as a last resort and the principle that non-custodial sentences are better for children, ignore concrete evidence that more time spent in custody increases the likelihood of re-offending (Walsh, T et al (2023))

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 there (The State of Queensland (2024)).

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 households (Amnesty International (2024)).

As such, I have no doubts that this bill will cause more harm to vulnerable Queenslanders including children as young as 10 years old, and ultimately to the whole Queensland community.

I 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 (Amnesty International Australia (2024)).

Diversion programs and services like this already exist in Queensland and other jurisdictions – and they're incredibly successful. Just some examples are:

- Johnathan Thurston Academy, Cairns: Queensland Government Media Statements (2023), [Study finds success in Far North youth program](#)
- Brodie Germaine Fitness, Mount Isa: ABC News (2023), [First Nations man Brodie Germaine using gym, time on country to guide young men away from crime](#)
- [Fitzroy Crossing's Night Place](#) (WA): National Indigenous Times (2024)
- [Brother to Another](#) (NT): Smarter Justice for Safer Communities (accessed Nov 2024)

Even in my own city of the Gold Coast, there are a number of programs which are tackling youth crime at its source and often before it becomes a problem. These include:

- Boot Camps for Troubled Youth: <https://www.veteranmentors.com.au/teen-boot-camps-gold-coast/>
- Project Booyah: <https://projectbooyah.com.au/locations/gold-coast/>
- The MOB Academy: <https://menofbusiness.com.au/>
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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 year (Amnesty International Australia (2024)) or to build new youth detention centres (\$627.61 million for the new Woodford facility (Qld Government (2024))).

In summary I 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,

Lew Johnson

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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>
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>