

Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024

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Committee Secretary
Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024

I oppose the Making QLD Safer Bill 2024 which breaches Human Rights Law and perpetuates the institutional harm that vulnerable families and children are forced to endure. I agree with the Human Rights Commissioner who said "A society that treats children as adults has clearly lost its way."

Police and youth justice were high on election campaign agendas - as both sides of politics competed to address the youth crime "epidemic" while the number of youth offenders has fallen by 20 per cent over the past five years.

Queensland has a long history of criminalising First Nations people, and this destructive practice is still going strong today. Shocking [data](#) reveals that Indigenous children and youth make up two-thirds of all children and young people in the Queensland justice system. There are good reasons why children and young people offend - including experiences of poverty and family violence - not to mention [intergenerational trauma](#) from colonisation and dispossession from traditional lands, along with oppressive government policies and practices that are ongoing.

This system is clearly failing First Nations children and their families. As the Queensland [Child Death Reviews Board](#) recently said "We have a system that can too easily fall into providing a negative cycle of more punitive practices and escalating behaviours that trap young people into anti-social and risk-taking behaviours that led to a cycle of incarceration."

Locking up children has been shown to expose them to [conditions](#) that are unsafe for and unacceptable to our community. Children are being kept in adult watch houses indefinitely. These watch houses are meant for adults for short stays, but children are being held there for weeks. The number of children in these watch houses is already at an all-time high, with reports of inadequate care, exposure to adult prisoners, police abuse, and even [sexual assault](#).

So why is the community so worried about crime when the rate is falling? It seems the frustration is with repeat offending, as property crimes by a small number of serious

repeat young offenders have grown according to the [Queensland Youth Justice Strategy 2024–2028](#).

Local communities are taking matters into their own hands - and moral panic can be fuelled by anti-crime Facebook groups containing “overtly racialised content” according to leading criminologist [Prof. Chris Cunneen](#). On one [Cairn's anti-crime Facebook](#) page a man wrote: "Many believe... these children need to suffer further physical abuse to teach them a lesson. This isn't the answer."

Meanwhile Indigenous mothers must be afraid to let their sons walk down the streets for fear that they will be accosted by vigilantes or stopped by police. In [Cairns](#) alone, frontline officers conducted 2,399 street checks during June-August 2024, resulting in 160 arrests of young people and 203 charges. So that's thousands of children, many of whom are probably innocent of any crime, being stopped and 'checked' by the police?

Research shows that Australians generally believe institutions should help to improve reconciliation, and when it comes to closing the gap in areas of disadvantage, the majority believes governments must do more.¹

I hope that Queensland parliament has the moral courage to oppose this legislation, and we can listen to the voices of the experts in social and community services and youth justice who tell us that the solution to youth crime is making kids safer not locking them up in prison for longer.

I urge the Committee to confront Queensland's brutal legacy of oppressive policies and practices that overwhelming impact upon First Nations children. Instead of tougher youth policing and punitive measures, which do not work, we must empower First Nations leadership and First Nations led solutions.

I protest the short timeframe (two days) for consultation on this Bill. It is undemocratic to prevent a full airing of the issues from all perspectives before making new legislation that has such serious consequences for our community.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this discussion and hope my late submission will be considered.

Yours sincerely

Bridget Jones

¹ [The Australian Reconciliation Barometer](#) (ARB), Reconciliation Australia