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# ***JUSTICE, INTEGRITY AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE***

## **Members present:**

Mr MA Hunt MP—Chair  
Mr MC Berkman MP  
Hon. DE Farmer MP  
Mr RD Field MP  
Ms ND Marr MP  
Mr PS Russo MP

## **Staff present:**

Ms F Denny—Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER (ADULT CRIME, ADULT TIME) AMENDMENT BILL 2025**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Tuesday, 6 May 2025**

**Cairns**

## TUESDAY, 6 MAY 2025

**The committee met at 1.00 pm.**

**CHAIR:** Good afternoon, everyone. I declare open this public hearing in Cairns for the committee's inquiry into the Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025. My name is Marty Hunt. I am the member for Nicklin and the chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today. With me here today are: Peter Russo, the member for Toohey; Russell Field, the member for Capalaba; Natalie Marr, the member for Thuringowa; Michael Berkman, the member for Maiwar; and the Hon. Di Farmer, the member for Bulimba, who is substituting for Melissa McMahon, the member for Macalister. I acknowledge in the room Terry James, the member for Mulgrave, and Bree James, the member for Barron River. Welcome, Terry and Bree.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

The Legislative Assembly and its committees recognise that matters awaiting or under adjudication in all courts exercising a criminal jurisdiction should not be referred to from the moment a charge is made against a person until the matter is resolved in the courts. All witnesses are, therefore, reminded not to refer to matters before the criminal courts in their evidence. Plainly speaking, if somebody has been arrested for a matter that you want to tell the committee about then you are not permitted to talk about that matter until it is resolved in a court. It is sub judice. Be careful of that.

As chair, I also ask members and witnesses to observe standing order 117, which restricts the naming of at-risk children. Importantly, evidence today should not readily identify a child who is subject to either the Child Protection Act 1999 or the Youth Justice Act 1992.

I remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded and a transcript will be published in due course. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Please turn all mobile phones off or to silent mode.

Finally, the committee notes that today's hearing could be triggering for those who have been affected by crime. If any witnesses require a break during proceedings today, please indicate to us. Please also approach the secretariat, Fran, if today's proceedings raise any issues for you.

### **McLEOD, Mr Aaron, President, Community Justice Action Group**

**CHAIR:** Good afternoon. Could you please introduce yourself and the capacity in which you are appearing today?

**Mr McLeod:** I am the President of the Community Justice Action Group. I would like to provide an opening statement if that is okay with you?

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Aaron. Go ahead and make your statement.

**Mr McLeod:** First of all, I seek leave to table this document.

**CHAIR:** Certainly. Is leave granted? Leave is granted.

**Mr RUSSO:** Excuse me, Chair. May I look at it before I accept the document?

**CHAIR:** Can you briefly explain what that is, Aaron?

**Mr RUSSO:** Can we see it?

**Mr McLeod:** Yes, you are welcome to.

**Mr RUSSO:** Through you, Chair, can I ask a question?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr RUSSO:** Do you have other copies or is this the only one?

**Mr McLeod:** I have emailed it through to the secretariat at parliament, but that is the only one I have here today.

**CHAIR:** Is it the case, Mr McLeod, that it was intended to be part of your submission but was inadvertently left off?

**Mr McLeod:** Correct.

**Mr RUSSO:** Chair, I understand that by accepting it we can deal with it, as to whether or not it is published at a later meeting.

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr BERKMAN:** Just to be clear: Mr McLeod is the author of this document?

**Mr McLeod:** I am, yes.

**Mr RUSSO:** Do you need it back?

**Mr McLeod:** You are welcome to have it. You can ask questions of me from that paper if you want to. I do not need it immediately.

**Mr RUSSO:** I have seen it. Leave has been granted by the chair so it is all good.

**CHAIR:** Yes, it is tabled. I invite you to make an opening statement, Mr McLeod.

**Mr McLeod:** Good afternoon, esteemed Chairman and honourable members of the committee. It is a privilege to address you today on behalf of the CJAG management committee. I extend my gratitude to you, Chairman, and to the committee for your progressive decision to adopt adult penalties for adult crimes within the youth justice framework. This bold step acknowledges our advocacy over the past four years and, therefore, the complexities of serious youth offending happening to our neighbours and loved ones. It signals a real commitment to balancing accountability, rehabilitation and community safety, a cornerstone of effective justice reform.

For those unfamiliar, CJAG is a voluntary organisation dedicated and focused on advocating for, supporting and engaging victim-survivors of crime across Queensland. We aim to be apolitical. Our mission is to advocate and support our members and those impacted by crime, ensuring their experiences inform policy and drive positive systematic change. We work tirelessly to foster safer communities by promoting policies that prioritise justice for victims, the rehabilitation of the afflicted and proper accountability of offenders and presumed authorities.

Our organisation is built on the principle that every community deserves to live in peace and every offender, particularly young people, deserve a fair chance at redemption through targeted early support and effective intervention. However, I am mindful of a famous quote by 18th century Scottish philosopher and political economist Adam Smith who said 'mercy to the guilty is cruelty to the innocent'.

CJAG is proud to represent a growing community of hundreds of members united in our pursuit of a fairer and more effective justice system. Beyond our ordinary membership, we engage through our social media platforms with a broader audience of about 37,000 people who actively support our campaigns and mostly share our vision for reform. This significant reach underscores the public's trust in CJAG as a leading voice in community justice advocacy and authentic peer-to-peer support of victim-survivors, and it reflects the urgency of the issue we champion.

Our priority policies are shaped by the lived experiences of victim-survivors and informed by evidence-based research. First, we advocate for parent accountability, recognising that family environments play a critical role in shaping youth behaviour and preventing offending. Secondly, we emphasise Public Service accountability, calling for robust mechanisms to ensure transparency and integrity within education, policing, justice and corrective systems. Third, we are committed to youth rehabilitation, supporting programs that address the root causes of offending such as trauma, mental afflictions, a lack of certainty, and learning and earning opportunities to reduce recidivism and foster reintegration. Finally, we seek justice for victims, ensuring that victim-survivors are heard, supported and prioritised in sentencing and policy decisions.

Among our key policy proposals today is the introduction of the sentencing bargaining paper, which I have tabled, within the youth justice system. This approach, carefully structured, could streamline core processes, reduce remand periods and encourage early guilty pleas, thereby minimising victim trauma and ensuring swifter justice outcomes. We believe sentencing bargaining, when paired with evidence-based rehabilitation measures, can strike a balance between accountability and the opportunity for young offenders to reform. We also urge the committee to consider *Little Scandinavia* and the Scandinavian Prison Program as a model for transforming youth detention facilities. Inspired by Scandinavian correctional systems, this program emphasises rehabilitation over

punishment, creating environments that foster personal responsibility and growth, learning, education and skill building. By adopting elements of this model, Queensland could reduce recidivism rates, which currently stand at 80 to 90 or 95 per cent within 12 months of release and provide young offenders with the tools to rebuild their lives.

Finally, we propose the establishment of a malfeasance standard Public Service accountability mechanism in the Public Service Act. This standard would hold public officials accountable for deliberate misconduct or negligence, giving rise to fair prosecution of misconduct in public office, particularly in the administration of communities and youth justice. By embedding such a standard, we can rebuild public trust in our institutions and ensure that those tasked with upholding justice act with the highest integrity.

In closing, CJAG is committed to collaborating with this committee to advance policies that create safer communities, support victim-survivors and rehabilitate young offenders. We believe that, through innovative reforms and a shared commitment to justice, Queensland can lead the nation in building a fairer, more effective youth justice system pragmatically and purposefully to protect the innocent.

I welcome any questions you may have and look forward to a constructive dialogue on how we can work together to achieve these shared goals. Thank you for your time.

**CHAIR:** Mr McLeod, in your submission you strongly advocate for justice for victims. What does justice look like to you? Where has the system been failing in regards to providing justice for victims?

**Mr McLeod:** It certainly starts at the accountability measure. The threshold of accountability is fundamental in the definition of justice that we understand, but it is certainly defined differently by a range of different people. Certainly in the context of the justice system in Queensland, justice has to be seen to be delivered and it actually has to be delivered to ensure that the public is safe in their own homes and in their own neighbourhoods. That is the definition of justice from our point of view.

**CHAIR:** We have a lot of submissions in relation to the trauma caused to children by detention et cetera. Can you comment on the trauma caused to victims when they do not see justice done?

**Mr McLeod:** Of course, trauma has similar human effects. I can speak to my own personal experiences around trauma. I have been through the process of substantial trauma so I am trauma informed myself. There are different degrees of trauma that apply to different people. Certainly the experience that we have is that while children, of course, are our first responsibility as a community, they themselves can be victims of crime and then go on to commit crime as an offender. We understand that for an adult who is seriously and violently offended against, certainly those who have been subjected to attempted murder and serious offences such as rape and serious violence, that trauma can also have a significant effect on that adult victim for the rest of their lives. Unfortunately, our system of justice does not measure the actual impact of that crime on the individual on an ongoing basis.

Therefore, we need to have a recalibration of our justice system in Queensland because the impact on victims, from our personal experience in dealing with the courts, particularly here in Cairns, is that there seems to be a misappropriation happening within the justice system to disregard victims' voices and the impacts on victims within the court system in order to deliver an expedient process because of resourcing constraints. We have a reality here that adult victims and children victims are traumatised just as much as a child who has been victimised by crime and that every human being should be treated with dignity.

**Mr RUSSO:** Mr McLeod, did you make a submission to the expert panel?

**Mr McLeod:** No, not directly.

**Mr RUSSO:** Have you seen any documentation from the expert panel?

**Mr McLeod:** I have read some papers on it, yes.

**Mr RUSSO:** When you say you have read some papers, where did you read those papers?

**Mr McLeod:** Where did I read them? They were read online.

**Mr RUSSO:** On what site?

**Mr McLeod:** I do not recall what site.

**Ms MARR:** When was your organisation formed? You have a lot of volunteers, I see. What year were you formed?

**Mr McLeod:** We were formed in March 2020.

**Ms MARR:** You spoke about the Scandinavian model. As a government, we are serious about making change for victims—putting them first—but also with rehabilitation, early intervention programs. We want result-driven programs and measurable ones that we can actually say, 'Yes, they are working and we want to continue to fund them.' With regard to the Scandinavian model that you spoke about, what were the outcomes in their program that you think we can implement? What makes you think that that will work for us?

**Mr McLeod:** Certainly the evidence so far from the program that has been trialled in Pennsylvania in the United States—there is a very high punitive value or principle within that system. The Scandinavian model, which is a Norwegian model, has been introduced into that adult system in the United States. In the three years they have been trialling that, there has not been any violence, there has been a significant reduction in workplace health and safety injuries for staff, and there has been a substantial outcome in terms of the education and work opportunities for those offenders.

The model of the Little Scandinavia program focuses on normality within a detention environment. It enables a safeguard for the community with regard to those serious recidivist offenders we are talking about. We are not talking about kids; we are talking about youth who have developed a skill set, who have developed a capability and capacity to commit serious violence and harm on other people. These are the ones we are focused on in terms of suggesting that the Little Scandinavia program would be an innovation, combined with the sentencing bargaining proposal that we put together, to enable youth in that situation to accept responsibility for their actions from the very moment that police come in contact with them and through the court system. It creates an environment of normality for the inmates in that system where they can get access to buying their own groceries, they can get access to normal social activities that a person would enjoy on the outside of a detention facility, but they are supported by highly skilled social workers and highly skilled mentors and coaches that are in situ within the facility on a 24-hour basis. It is a very costly system compared to other systems, but the results of that program have been very effective.

**Ms MARR:** Results as in less offending, education?

**Mr McLeod:** Yes. Of course, the significant impact has been the reduction in staff injuries. Staffing and having the capabilities within these facilities is absolutely essential. This program has identified a substantial reduction.

**Ms MARR:** That is important to us, too, to make sure we have staff who feel safe in their environment and are able to go home safe. I am the member for Thuringowa, which is in Townsville, and I was born in Cairns, so I understand what we have been going through in regional Queensland at this time. Thank you for your time today.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I had a really quick look at the paper you tabled. The Little Scandinavia approach looks really interesting. I would be in fulsome agreement about the benefits of that kind of approach. I notice particularly some features of the program include cultural supports, individualised case management, education and training, supports for health, mental health and substance abuse, and reintegration supports. Is it fair to say that these are the kinds of initiatives that countless youth justice advocates have been pushing for, for a lot of years now, but the investment simply has not been made in those kinds of programs?

**Mr McLeod:** They have certainly paid attention to the rehabilitation elements that would encompass those features, but what we have found is that the community-based rehabilitation model has been catastrophic. There is a substantial body of evidence—it is unequivocal—that over the last five years, unfortunately, we have seen so many fatalities from youth who were supposed to be on bail, on community-based orders or on parole and who are out there driving weapons and killing people. I acknowledge Russell; he understands this acutely.

Our estimate—it is hard to find the numbers, but the environment is different. Little Scandinavia specifically creates an environment where there is a safeguard—it is an absolute safeguard—but, to use the terminology most people understand, certainly on this panel, it also comes with mitigating factors that enable youth to get rehabilitation within that detention facility, as opposed to the other way around, which is what the previous government and the Youth Justice Strategy tried to do, where they actually defined children as victims and they victimised them even further, and they actually then developed a mitigation strategy around community-based sentencing. That was reducing incarceration rates and a whole range of programs. This turns the system on its head and develops the context of rehabilitation within that safeguard environment.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I am specifically interested in what we currently have in terms of our youth detention centres. I do not think you would disagree that Cleveland Youth Detention Centre is where most young offenders from around here are likely to end up, as I understand it, and effectively none of those kinds of supports that line up with the Little Scandinavia model exist there. Is that a fair statement?

**Mr McLeod:** Not to the standard that is being applied in the Little Scandinavia program.

**Mr BERKMAN:** To any standard, I would ask. Are you aware of any of those rehabilitative programs that exist in Cleveland?

**Mr McLeod:** Each offender, each inmate, each detainee, is held within their own room, within their own unit, within their own living environment, where they have a normality of facilities within that environment—things like fish tanks and a whole range of things that we would enjoy in our own home environment. The Little Scandinavia program puts them in their own unit, where they engage in domestic habits that are consistent with what they would do in a community environment when they are reintegrated. It ensures community standards of living are built within the detention facility, but the standards that are applied within Little Scandinavia are more commensurate with a community environment, a normal domestic relationship environment, than to a physical punitive detention environment, which is what Cleveland is. It is going to require a redesign of the facility. I understand there is funding available for two new detention centres, potentially, but those detention centres, I would suggest, would need to get the blueprints of the Little Scandinavia program out of Norway because their recidivism rate is 20 per cent. Recidivism in that system is 20 per cent. That is what we are suggesting—a proven model.

There is more work being done in terms of being able to assimilate that model into punitive systems, like they are doing in Pennsylvania. Hardened criminals in that system are not committing offences because they are being treated with dignity and humanity within that facility that has created a normality culture within it. The safeguards are that they are in a detention environment and the relevant security standards are applied so that we do not allow these kids to go out and drive cars, get knives or break into homes and traumatise people—and more children even.

**Mr BERKMAN:** You mentioned the two additional detention centres that are currently proposed and at least in part funded. If we end up with facilities that are essentially the same as Cleveland, would you expect the existing youth detention facilities in Queensland will just end up with more of the same problems and high recidivism rates?

**Mr McLeod:** Yes, we will.

**Mr FIELD:** Aaron, your submission recognises that an increase in penalty acts as a deterrent. With the Scandinavian model, is the intent that it be like a secure boarding school environment where these kids are educated and learn life skills?

**Mr McLeod:** I have to be careful about characterising it that way because I think the Newman government, unfortunately, created some substantial problems for our community with regard to their boot camp program. I have to be very careful about acknowledging that. With all due respect, Russell, I do not really want to characterise it as a boarding school as such. It is actually not a boarding school; it is a facility that has detention centre security standards while the design of the facility is as normal as possible—similar to what they would experience within a body corporate environment, for example, where there are 150 or 200 units and everyone has their own unit, privacy and dignity. That is more like the model we are referring to as opposed to a boarding house.

**Ms FARMER:** Thank you very much for appearing before us today and for the work you obviously do over many hours. You have talked a lot about early intervention, prevention and rehabilitation, as well as more punitive measures. We are looking at the third punitive bill put forward by this government. Are you disappointed that we are yet to see any money given to rolled gold early intervention and prevention in this government's term when they made quite a big deal of it going into the election?

**Mr McLeod:** That is a political question, Di. It is a political question.

**CHAIR:** Feel free to not answer, Mr McLeod. You do not have to answer that if you do not want to.

**Ms FARMER:** Would you like to see more early intervention and prevention measures already underway by this government?

**Mr McLeod:** What we want to see is more effective measures, and what we are finding is that—and I am broadening the answer here a little bit, Di, because you have given me licence to answer a political question—

**CHAIR:** We have run out of time, Mr McLeod, but I will give you a minute if you want to make comment.

**Mr McLeod:** What we are missing is effectiveness within the framework of government. We are seeing efficiency, and we can actually get a lot of justification from government. There have been various audits commissioned and a whole range of things talking about how efficiently the money gets used, but what we do not see are the effectiveness measures on the ground. As one example, when we first got started we produced a survey to find out the facts in the community as to the impact on victims. What we subsequently found out is that the government in Queensland has not bothered to ask people in the community, generally speaking, how much time it has cost them—time away from family, away from work and away from their economic opportunities—because they have been impacted by crime. There is one criminology report assessment that was done nearly 15 years ago. I would suggest that the government immediately get a survey out into the community, using independent people like us who have trusted relationships within the community, to get the facts about the real impact of crime. I have some numbers there. I think about \$16 billion is the current estimate.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr McLeod. I hate to cut you off, sir, but we have run out of time. I appreciate you coming along today and your submission.

**KETCHELL, Ms Stacey, President, Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation**

**CHAIR:** Would you like to make an opening statement to the committee before we move to questions?

**Ms Ketchell:** Thank you for inviting us to be a part of this hearing and taking our submissions as part of this process. We are Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good. We were four young people who co-founded it in our families and our communities back in 2016. I think our oldest member at that time was 25. We had lived experiences and wanted to see something different for our future and also our peers and our community moving forward. We have been in existence since 2016. We were very much voluntary and built our organisation purely on lived experiences and community aspirations here in Cairns but also for our surrounding regions. We speak about our young people who come through as part of our crisis supports but then right through to young people in leadership and doing amazing things. We believe young people need support, no matter what journey they are on right now. We see the opportunity and change in the trajectory of young people who are experiencing crisis when they are exposed to different experiences and many opportunities. We see that change for them. That is sort of what we bring over the last nearly 10 years that we have been established.

The biggest thing we have seen over the past nine years is the restrictions on some of the initiatives that have come through funding models that allow us only to do this bit but we know that the response has to be this. We are an organisation that has been creative with resources because we need to provide holistic supports, because we know it is about the young person and the families and communities they come from. They need holistic support, especially around therapeutic supports and psychological interventions. The biggest thing for us is rebuilding our village for our young people. It is not just our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people; it is for all young people. We have worked with all young people in our community who are in either the crisis space and/or leadership doing amazing things. Sometimes they find themselves in a situation where they need support.

We come very much from lived experience, with very much community-based solutions that we have advocated for over the nine years as young people and actually journeyed through this with our families. We have always been on this advocacy journey. Some things stem from some of the injustices and impacts of our histories of this country so we acknowledge that, but we want to work with governments to see those creative solutions that we have put forward from our young people who have experienced this for themselves—they are telling us what it is they want and they see in their experience—but also from our families. That is what we bring today, and I hope that we can come up with something that ensures all young people—for the future of Australia, for the future of Queensland—are treated with dignity and respect and the love they deserve.

I understand that there is a small portion of our community who are causing some harm and distress at this point, but when we peel back the layers there are many instances where systems and structures have failed our young people. We know that education, health and housing are the underlying issues. We look forward to working with you all.

**CHAIR:** Do you accept that at some point in time detention of a young person is an appropriate response?

**Ms Ketchell:** There has to be some. We definitely agree that the safety of our community has to come first as well, but it is also about the safety of our young people. It is the quality of the service and the therapeutic supports in the detention facility that needs to be improved and/or established. We hear the stories from Cleveland. We see the numbers. Cleveland is one facility that has an increase of our young people returning in ways that the others do not see.

**CHAIR:** In your submission you give us a case study of Amelia. You outline that Amelia was not able to get education, which is really important, as you said, in that facility because of some behavioural issues. Do you welcome the LNP's commitment to detention with a purpose and compulsory education in those facilities?

**Ms Ketchell:** Yes, and I think it needs to come with data transparency around what is actually being delivered. We have been advocating for that because, from my understanding, there is supposed to be therapeutic supports in our facilities currently. We need that education before that young person gets into this cycle. That is the piece. This is why we have always advocated for early intervention and prevention models and community-led solutions rather than where we are now. We have to have a solution for our young people who are going through this and causing this harm in our community, but we want to prevent these numbers from happening. This is one of our learnings from the nine years of DIYDG being established.

When we were looking for funding and investment supports for our creative solutions as young people in these communities, it all aligned to crisis. It was very limited in terms of early intervention and prevention models. We had to be creative and start our own business to innovate and provide those solutions for our young people—our peers at the time—because the funding faces to this pointy end. How do we go back to and invest in these models that limit our young people ending up there? We know that if a young person is not educated and disengages from school by 15 years old, they are highly likely to get a one-way ticket to Cleveland.

**Ms FARMER:** Thank you for appearing before us today and for your submission. You talk a lot about early intervention and prevention and the capacity of young people to even engage in the system. Amelia's story touched all of us. Something that is very topical in Cairns at the moment is the call to have free mandatory FASD testing for at-risk children. I think the Victims' Commissioner called for that in her submission to this inquiry. What is your view on that? Would you like to see that happening as well? It means you are starting kids off as early as possible with support; does it not?

**Ms Ketchell:** Yes, we do see that once that young person receives a diagnosis and the family understands what that is the supports can come into play. It is when we are unable to have the diagnosis that the tailored supports for that young person are not appropriate. I guess then the system's and the process's policies would be much more informed by understanding the true impacts on our young people.

It is not the only assessment that needs to be done. Family unit assessment needs to be done as well: where this young person is coming from, what their family is like—like we have shared Amelia's story for the submission as part of the systems. We see young people who have never been in the youth justice system before, but as soon as they enter the child safety system there is a correlation with the young people offending because that family kinship structure and responsibility is destructed. That is part of the solution we have been advocating for for a long time. We call it rebuilding our village for all of our young people, no matter their race or ethnicity, because it is about that sense of belonging, that sense of identity that young people are grappling with. They are trying to find who they are, what they stand for, what are their values in this world, what are their opinions without technology: 'Who am I? What do I want to be?' When they do not have that structured support at home to help them navigate that, that is when the sense of powerlessness and the sense of grief comes into play and that risk-taking opportunity presents itself, and then we see the effects happen.

The biggest thing for us is: how do we rebuild the community and a village for this young person? DIYDG has created our Kunjur men's group collective. We have our young leadership program under that, because we need our strong men and strong women in our lives. We need our peers to be strong with us, to come along this journey, but the young person is centred. It is about that wraparound. We have been able to work with many of our young people, who have actually seen some progress, but, again, we are very limited and systems come into play. We have been taken away from working with a young person, and that is where we see some of the reoffending happen.

I think there are many solutions, but it is more that early intervention—education, housing, health and mental health for young people—that needs to be addressed so we can see the numbers. I want to make reference to the numbers as well. It is very small numbers of our young people in this community who are causing some of this distress at the moment. There are young people doing amazing things and we need to amplify that, because that gives us hope and that gives us unity. We need that, because when young people are painted like that in the media you see an effect on other young people, who go, 'Well, I'm not like that. Why are they saying that? Because I am this person, they are saying I am a person like this as well.' That then leads to a conversation that we have to have. We are having many conversations, even with my nieces and nephews, preparing them for what this world is heading to and how best they can navigate this world in some of these uncertain times.

**Ms MARR:** Thank you for being here today. You said earlier that we need change for the youth offenders. As a government we agree with you, but we unashamedly have decided to put victims first. That is finding a balance, of course, for offenders and the community and that is providing programs for better community outcomes. You spoke about early intervention and rehabilitation, which is what we have focused on. Your submission was very critical of the former system as it exists and the failings of the system, which you have spoken about quite a lot today. Do you agree, then, that we need to see change—with legislation, with how we do rehabilitation and with how we do early intervention to make sure the community is safe by putting victims first? Do you agree that we need to have some change, because you do not agree with what we are doing with Adult Crime, Adult Time legislation? Do you agree that we need change and how do you see that? How do you think we move forward without the changes we are putting forward today?

**Ms Ketchell:** I agree that we need change. I know from last year or the year before that when you have to overturn human rights legislation to put through a bill that rings alarm bells for us, especially for the future of Queensland. We agree that there needs to be change, but we have to be so careful, we have to act with humility and dignity and we need our victims to feel safe. Our young people are victims as well, as we heard from the previous witness. Our young people are victims of crime, whether it is from the drug crime that is here in Cairns—adults are actually supporting and teaching our young people—or whether it is family and domestic violence they have seen. They are victims of crime themselves. What are the therapeutic supports—that early intervention model—that support them to navigate that trauma, work through it and strengthen their confidence to move forward?

Many of our families have been victims as well. The research shows that we have some of the highest numbers of victims, but we do not like that label of ‘victim’, because we all have a responsibility for our children. If we change that language, that dialogue, that they are children, what is our responsibility as a society to contribute to their development and the government’s responsibility to contribute to the future progress of Queensland? We are only pushing the problem down the line because we know that we are just perpetuating the cycle and they will end up in adult incarceration. The research shows that there is so much out there, so how do we intervene now and make better investment choices and decisions to go into this space of the underlying root causes—education, health, housing? We know that if a young woman is educated to year 12 she makes better choices for her family when she becomes a mother. We need to ensure our young people get quality education. In this region that is not happening at the moment in some of our schools.

**Ms MARR:** You did speak of human rights and the alarm bells around that. Do you agree that victims also have rights?

**Ms Ketchell:** Yes.

**Ms MARR:** So you can understand why we have had to make those changes—that we want the rights for everybody, not just the offenders?

**Ms Ketchell:** Yes. I totally agree, but I think we need to find that balance because they are minors. In terms of their neurological development, they are not fully developed until they are 21. There is a lot of research out there that backs that as well. How do we contribute to the development and success of all Queensland children?

**Ms FARMER:** Would you like to see money going out to some of those early intervention and prevention initiatives, the new ones, or would you like to see them already in place?

**Ms Ketchell:** Yes, definitely. We need—

**Ms FARMER:** The new ones that the government has promised?

**Ms Ketchell:** The new ones. I think it is about the community, because one size does not fit all. We need to be able to apply it based on place. For those in the Far North region compared to young people down south, there are different challenges at times that contribute to their support systems. We definitely need to listen and I think that has been one of our frustrations. We have been working with government for some time but trying to come up with a model and advocate that. Our models have been put forward by young people for our young people. We need to be listened to. That is the basis of DIYDG. We were young people who felt very voiceless and we knew that we needed structure, a legal entity; hence we formed an organisation to always advocate for our young people. No matter what that investment looks like, we just need to listen to the people on the ground and invest in solutions for them based on place, because it does vary through different parts of Queensland.

**Mr FIELD:** Your case studies all vary, but do you accept that accountability or consequences for one’s actions—whether they are elderly, youth, children or whatever—is essential to a proper rehabilitation? There has to be consequences for anybody’s actions, no matter what age they are. Do you think that is a fair comment?

**Ms Ketchell:** I definitely think there needs to be consequences, but in determining the consequence there needs to be an understanding of the contribution to one’s actions. Some of our young people who are in this system have been impacted by other failed systems. We need to take a moment when we do that. This is why it was alarm bells for us because this is legislation; this is a law that gives the right to judges to hand down the consequence that they feel is appropriate without taking into consideration all these past impacts on this young person.

**Mr FIELD:** But what about the victims here? The judges are there to hand down the sentence as it is in the law, and justice needs to be done and it needs to be seen to be done. There are a lot of reasons people offend all the way through, but at the end of the day the victim should always come first. Have I got that right?

**Ms Ketchell:** We need to ensure our victims, our families, all feel safe in this community. I think that is the biggest factor. No matter if you are a victim of crime, I think our young people still feel targeted because of the media and all this attention on crime. I just want to paint a picture of this because not all of our young people are criminals.

**Mr FIELD:** I understand that.

**Ms Ketchell:** Yes, victims have to feel safe, but a secondary sort of impact in the measures put forward is that it creates this sense of discrimination and racism in our community where our young people still do not feel safe regardless. Yes, victims are impacted directly, but then there is a secondary impact as well that we have to be conscious about when we are putting these laws through. I think there are victims who have come out and been supportive of therapeutic and early intervention models because they do not want to see young people locked up as well but they want to feel safe. We are in agreement with that.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I really appreciate your time and testimony today. The example you have given in your submission around Amelia really demonstrates those overlapping sorts of disadvantages—the family violence, sexual assault, homelessness, FASD. It reflects what we have heard from countless other submitters in different inquiries over the years—that the kids who are presenting the most behavioural problems almost always, if not always, have some major trauma or disadvantage that underlies that. Does that reflect your experience? What are the most common types of disadvantages that the worst offending kids are struggling with?

**Ms Ketchell:** With the young people we work with in the crisis space, Amelia's is a very common story—homelessness, sexual assault, drug violence, lack of education and opportunities, and mental health. They are all common denominators under all of it. We see that in many of our young people and families. Once they get that support there is a change and they flourish, so we know it works. We have tested it and trialled it here in Cairns off our own backs and we know it works. We just need to have the right investment into those early intervention and prevention models that we have put forward.

**CHAIR:** Thanks for attending today and for your submission. We appreciate it very much.

**EDEN, Ms Amy, Mayor, Cairns Regional Council**

**CHAIR:** Welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement to the committee before we move to questions.

**Ms Eden:** I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the residents of Cairns and the broader Far North Queensland region. Our community is deeply invested in the outcomes of these legislative reforms. We understand that criminal justice policy is complex and that striking the right balance between rehabilitation, deterrence, consequences and community safety is no small task. For our residents, for those living in the stark reality of what feels like relentless waves of crime, this is not an abstract issue; it is frightening, it is traumatic and it is a lived experience. I am here today on behalf of the Cairns Regional Council to support two key reforms before the committee: the proposed amendment to section 175A of the Youth Justice Act—often referred to as the Adult Crime, Adult Time provision—and the extension of the trial of electronic monitoring of youth offenders on bail under the monitoring devices amendment bill.

Let me be very clear: Cairns is hurting. We are one of the hardest hit regions in Queensland for youth crime, particularly repeat offending. Our residents in suburbs are afraid in their own homes. Businesses are being broken into. Cars are being stolen. Sporting and community clubs—which are vital places of connection for young people—are being repeatedly vandalised. Council's infrastructure is being damaged at an escalating rate, placing a significant financial burden on our ratepayers. Council's community safety unit tracked 370 youth related incidents from our CCTV camera network in 2023, and by 2024 that had risen to 475. That is not police data or a comprehensive collection of incidents; that is just observations from our CitySafe camera room. The trend is still climbing. In fact, it is not just a trend in terms of numbers and incidents that are increasing; it is the severity of some of the crimes that is also escalating. This is deeply troubling.

I am sure the committee members are aware of some of the horrific crimes that have happened here in Cairns. Out of respect for those victims, I will not speak to the details of those crimes today; needless to say, these crimes have sickened our community to the core. These crimes have sparked city-wide outrage and disgust. We need urgent intervention. We need stronger measures, tougher consequences and immediate solutions to turn the crime crisis around, and that is why we strongly support the proposed reforms under the Adult Crime, Adult Time legislation.

These reforms are not about being punitive for the sake of being punitive; they are about accountability where it matters the most. The amendment expands the range of serious offences for which courts may consider adult sentencing, including armed robbery, sexual assault and attempted murder. These are not minor transgressions; they are acts that change lives, destroy trust and leave trauma that lasts for years and, in some cases, a lifetime. Critically, this reform preserves judicial discretion; it does not mandate a one-size-fits-all approach, and rightly so. It gives our courts the tools to respond when the gravity of an offence and its impact on community safety demand more than a soft touch.

On the issue of electronic monitoring, Cairns was included in the 2023 expansion of the electronic monitoring trial for youth on bail, and we welcomed the decision.

**CHAIR:** Mayor, I will pull you up there because that is commenting on a bill that is not before the committee today.

**Ms Eden:** It is not before the committee today?

**CHAIR:** No. That legislation has been passed. We just need to focus on the current bill, so just noting your support for that trial is fine.

**Ms Eden:** In closing, it is not just about justice; it is about the start of restoring confidence and, we hope, some peace of mind to our residents, many of whom currently live in fear in their own homes. Our community wants to believe that the justice system can keep them safe. They want to know that there are real consequences for those who do harm but also that there is a path back for those who can be rehabilitated. These reforms are not about giving up on young people; they are about saying that we will not give up on our communities either. Cairns stands ready to be part of a long-term solution and, on behalf of the Cairns Regional Council, I thank the committee for your time and for the seriousness with which you are considering these changes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mayor, for appearing before us today. In your submission and in your address, you outline the protections for your community and that is great. The Cairns community and the businesses of Cairns rely heavily on tourism. Can you comment on the reputational damage that this youth justice crisis is creating in your region and how it is affecting the business community, for example?

**Ms Eden:** I can. I was just meeting with the Japanese consul today. Obviously, safety is the No. 1 thing that they are always talking to me about. To go on further with an example that I do not believe was in the press—and it was intentionally kept out of the press for that reason—a young Japanese tourist was hit in the head with a rock—

**CHAIR:** Before you continue, is that before a court at the moment?

**Ms Eden:** Not to my knowledge, no. The young child sustained significant head injuries and was sent to Townsville for emergency surgery. The local tourism business community put the hat around and raised, I think, around \$100,000 to make sure that the family got the medical care that young child needed, that they got home safely as soon as possible and to try to restore their belief in the people of Cairns and in the community that we are so that they would come back and they would be welcomed. That is just one little example that, yes, we are a tourism city and we rely heavily on it and, yes, we are hurting every single day with stories like that.

**Ms FARMER:** Thank you, Mayor, for your passionate defence of your city. We have all been reading the stories about crime rates in Cairns. I was reading that there was a 33 per cent increase in robberies in the first three months of this year, which is after that first tranche of laws had gone through. Given the high crime rates and increasing crime rates here, what else would you like to see happening to make a difference for Cairns?

**Ms Eden:** There are quite a few little things that I think, if done simultaneously, would have a positive ripple effect. We have QPS working with our CitySafe cameras under peak periods using youth crime funding. That is having a positive impact. That means our CitySafe staff have that police officer there. They work to the highest standards and, equally, the police officer wants to be performing in front of our CitySafe program, so that has proven really successful. It has been going on for a few months. Continued funding for that would be really fantastic.

It is about making sure we have the appropriate referral services for families and schools. It is about making sure the legislation is implemented for schools so if young people are not attending schools then something is actually being done about it and it is not just a constant loophole, as we continue to find.

Equally, I heard just last week a very distressing statistic from one of my fellow councillors so I am not sure exactly where it came from. Apparently, Cairns is equal second when it comes to the top 10 recidivist offenders. That is really quite distressing for our community. Having worked in youth justice myself for quite a few years on the Cairns Safer Streets taskforce, I would say that, from a council point of view, we are connected where we need to be connected to make sure we are supporting services to do their jobs and vice versa. We are supporting where we can to make sure they are getting the best outcomes they can.

With the hardcore recidivist offenders, I know that intensive case management has been happening for years, yet on the ground we are not seeing any results of that. Something different would need to happen. We know that the formative years, zero to five, are paramount for early intervention. I would strongly encourage the committee and the government to continue to invest in that space, noting that when you have recidivist offenders who are hardcore early intervention is really not the answer, in my opinion. Having suitable programs and removal from peer groups in the areas where they are continuing to offend is really quite critical.

**CHAIR:** I notice that the police flying squad has been in town doing a lot of work recently, which I am sure you welcome.

**Ms Eden:** Absolutely.

**Ms MARR:** Mayor, I know that you have been in the community for quite some time. I know this is your first term as mayor but you have been on council. You did talk about the escalation of crime in your city and the escalation of violence that we see. I am sure you will agree that what started off as opportunistic crime and no consequences for actions for almost 10 years is why these offences are occurring and becoming more aggressive and more violent, because they have been getting away with it for such a long time. You also speak about your community and how they feel exhausted—

**Ms FARMER:** Point of order, Chair.

**CHAIR:** What is your point of order, member?

**Ms FARMER:** I think the member is stating as fact something which cannot be proven.

**CHAIR:** Round that into a question, please, member.

**Ms MARR:** The question is: can you please speak on behalf of your community about why they agree that we need to make changes to the legislation with these new offences with Adult Crime, Adult Time and how that will make your community feel that something different is being done?

**Ms Eden:** To give an example, the CBD and, in particular, Shields Street and Lake Street are hotspots for antisocial behaviour and youth crime. From an observational point of view, from our CitySafe camera staff as well as me, being on council for a while, what used to happen is some petty shoplifting—maybe stealing chewing gum and a couple of drinks and so on. That is still happening but it is happening with a level of violence and damage to property that we have never seen before. I would suggest that there has been this pattern of behaviour of ‘take what you need and she’ll be right’ and you continue on your merry way. That has escalated into ‘how can we make that a bit more fun’ because nothing is really happening in that regard. You keep doing that behaviour, but you add a little bit more. We have seen that the adding of a little bit more, which is the violence and the damage to property, has continually escalated over the past five years that I know of. I have had many conversations with the head of our CCTV camera room and that is what business owners are saying to them.

Council is doing what we can. We have a rapid response clean-up unit. We have a 24/7 phone number for the business community in the CBD. In the last 12 months we have also invested in suburban safety patrols. We are trying to work with police—trying to tap into all the cameras and have that presence so that we can radio police as soon as possible because the escalation seems to have increased.

That has triggered one little thought. We have a lot of CCTV cameras in Cairns. We have around 500 that are maintained by council but there are a lot of transport cameras and the like. If there was a trial program where you were linking all of those cameras and all of the intel to get real-time data and visibility, Cairns would be open for a trial as such.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I want to ask one quick question for clarification. In your opening statement you said that these reforms are not about being punitive for the sake of being punitive.

**Ms Eden:** Correct.

**Mr BERKMAN:** Have you seen that in the statement of compatibility for this bill it says, in as many words, that the purposes of the proposed amendments are punishment and denunciation. It goes on to observe that the amendments may lead to sentences for children that are more punitive than necessary to achieve community safety. Does that concern you?

**Ms Eden:** I have faith in the judicial system and I would like to think our community do, too. Having that discretion for the impact I think is really important. I am not a doctor so I do not claim to give medical advice and certainly I am no judge or magistrate giving that advice. I can say that there have been times in the past when the consequence really has not matched the expectation of the community but equally for that young person and for their family. We know there is a whole lot of reform that needs to happen.

I personally know—and correct me if I am wrong—that you have young people who are on remand and are not getting the education and life skills while on remand that they should be and could be. They come back before the court and they get time as served and they are released back into the community without the potential wraparound support that they could have had.

Really, it is the discretion that I believe is the important part here to make sure that if this is a one-off—obviously, in my mind, I am talking about recidivist offenders, those hardcore repeat offenders, because we know that they are causing 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the youth crime incidents here in Cairns. Obviously, I cannot speak for anywhere else. It is really significant to ensure that history and the impacts on lives and on the community are taken into account and equally, of course, make sure the supports are available for that young person and potentially their family if that is required.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I do not think it is contentious to say that there has been very little in the way of additional early intervention and prevention programs that have been funded and rolled out before these legislative amendments are made. Is that a cause for concern or do you have any observations about the urgency with which we need to fund and commence those early intervention and prevention programs?

**Ms Eden:** To be fair, there are significant early intervention services that are here. In my observation, where there could be opportunity for scaffolding is for the hardcore recidivist offenders and making sure there are the appropriate facilities, whether you want to call it a transition house or

remote sentencing—call it what you will—for the young people who are coming out of detention to go before they are put back into the environment that has led them to the path they are on, which is going to continue.

When you have 13 or 30 people living in a home that clearly is not made for that number of people—and we know that hot-bedding occurs—we know that there is going to be a whole range of activity happening when we really want our young people sleeping to grow their minds and to obviously engage in education or training or work. That is not happening.

For me, it is really having somewhere at that pointy end. I do not believe that there is enough for the hardcore recidivist offenders. I believe that if that was addressed significantly—not with a bandaid but significantly—we would start to see an impact, obviously, with the sentencing times and also with the opportunity for rehabilitation, which I think is really important. I hope that answers the question.

**Mr BERKMAN:** Thanks, Mayor.

**Mr FIELD:** You spoke before about rehabilitation being critical, and I think we all understand that. Do you think the new Adult Crime, Adult Time laws strike a fair balance between deterrence with sentencing and rehabilitation? When it comes to serious offending, everybody has to have consequences for their actions at some point in time. Do you think these new additions will go towards deterring some individuals?

**Ms Eden:** Absolutely. We know that a lot of offending happens through that peer pressure environment. If you take out one or two persons in that group dynamic, it completely changes. That can change the behaviour of that group. You do not necessarily have the ringleader instigating some of that criminal activity so, yes, I do believe that.

**Ms FARMER:** Mayor, several years ago now the previous government flagged a detention centre to be built in Cairns. I understand that the new government has not yet identified a location. Would you like to see that work hurried along so that there is confirmation of that and there is a detention facility available in this region?

**Ms Eden:** I believe I speak on behalf of the community when I say that, of course, we would welcome any such announcements. I have heard on the grapevine—obviously this is not the place to talk about what you hear on the grapevine, but from what I understand it is going to be a coordinated approach, which I believe the community would be quite happy with. Absolutely, as a matter of urgency, the community would like confirmation, I am sure.

**Ms FARMER:** Am I allowed a follow-up question, Chair? Do we have time?

**CHAIR:** We are out of time, but that does not go to the bill anyway. What is your follow-up question?

**Ms FARMER:** It was going to be about that question. If the consequences of this bill are that there will be more young people in the system for longer periods—and the director-general of the department told us last week that it can take up to 3½ years to plan and build a new facility—

**CHAIR:** Do you have a question or are you just making a political statement? Do you have a question for the witness?

**Ms FARMER:** I am interested in the mayor's views on that.

**CHAIR:** I think she just answered that, and we are out of time. Thank you for your attendance today, Mayor. We appreciate your time very much.

We will now move to community statements. The committee will now invite to the table individually witnesses who have registered to speak to the committee. If you have not already registered but would like to, please see Fran. If you do want to speak at some stage, just move to the side there or put your hand up and Fran will come and speak to you. In the interests of time, each witness will be offered approximately three to five minutes to address the committee. We probably have time for about five minutes each. I will keep an eye on the clock. The committee appreciates your patience in this process and we will do our best to accommodate as many witnesses as possible.

**REGHENZANI, Ms Jenelle, Private capacity**

**CHAIR:** Welcome. Please introduce yourself for the record.

**Ms Reghenzani:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Jenelle Reghenzani and I am fairly well known around the place due to my being quite active in fighting crime. First of all, thank you for allowing me to speak about my tragic set of circumstances concerning youth crime in our community. On 20 September 2022, I was pulled unresponsive from my home in a serious house fire where I lost everything I owned and also nearly lost my life. I was discharged from the intensive care unit and stayed in hospital for two days. I went to stay with my girlfriend and one morning I asked to go down to the shops. She said, 'Take my son and his friend because you're still quite anxious from the house fire.' I said, 'That is okay. I will be all right.'

**CHAIR:** Sorry to pull you up here, but I have just got word that that might be before a court at the moment.

**Ms Reghenzani:** No, it is not. It is all done.

**CHAIR:** It has all been resolved?

**Ms Reghenzani:** Two years ago—it is all done and dusted. Coming back from the shops, I noticed the car in front of me was a stolen car—I had watched a lot of TV while I was in intensive care. I pulled to the side of the road and dialled triple O to get assistance. The triple O operator said, 'Lock the doors of your car. Do not antagonise the driver and wait for police to attend. Do not make it obvious that you are calling us and we will get police there to help you as soon as we can.' The stolen car then pulled over further up the road from me and the boys. This escalated when another car turned up, and the triple O operator then said to me, 'Yes, that car is also stolen and they're working together doing break and enters.'

I was trapped and scared for my life. I could not move because they boxed me in when the other car turned up. I was terrified. I was panicking. I did not know what to do. My adrenaline had kicked in and I was sitting there shaking, waiting for the police to turn up. During that time, unfortunately, the stolen car had reversed up the street and smashed the whole front of my car and the driver's side. He sent me flying backwards in the car and I was injured mentally, physically and emotionally. I have had to have extensive counselling to be able to deal with the anxiety and pain I suffered in that attack.

I believe that if a curfew was brought in there would be much less crime and police would be given much more support and power to take these wayward children off our streets at night, which is when most of the crimes have been committed. They absolutely have no respect for the law or anyone else either. This has left me with horrific anxiety and has changed my life forever.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Thanks for coming along today and telling us your experience. Do you support the Adult Crime, Adult Time laws that will increase sentences for repeat young offenders?

**Ms Reghenzani:** I do to an extent. My heart does go out to children who are not loved or cared for. I am a single mother. I have brought all of my children up since the youngest was three, and I love my kids with all my might. My heart goes out to those kids in our community who are not loved. I feel a lot of it stems from their upbringing and a lot of the problems cannot be solved overnight. I think there has to be a lot of intervention and a lot of looking into the root of the problem—where it is coming from, the very deep root of the problem. We cannot wait until they get to 10, 14 or 15 years old; it has to be dealt with at the root of the problem—that is, where they are not loved or cared for, their home situation.

**CHAIR:** Thanks. Any questions from members to my left?

**Ms FARMER:** I just wanted to say thank you so much for sharing.

**Ms Reghenzani:** It was a horrible week for me. I lost everything in my house, I lost my car and then my dog died as well that week—three things. It has affected my family also, not just me. As you can imagine, it affects not just me but also my kids, my mum, my father, my aunty and my uncle. Do you know what I mean? It does not just affect me; it is a tumbleweed. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** We appreciate your coming along today.

**DAWSON, Ms Sarah, Private capacity**

**CHAIR:** Thank you for coming along. I invite you to make a submission, thanks, Sarah.

**Ms Dawson:** Good afternoon. I am here today to share with you a deeply personal and shocking experience that underscores the growing concern of youth crime in our community. A year ago, our home was invaded by a group of adolescents—a crime that has left a scar on our lives and has compelled us to advocate for meaningful change. Our ordinary day turned into a nightmare when four youths broke into our house. These individuals were highly organised, using two stolen vehicles as getaway cars, which they had stolen the night before, that were idling out the front of my house with more youths inside.

**CHAIR:** Sarah, I am sorry to interrupt you. I do not want to do this for every person giving evidence so I will just give a general reminder: if anything is before the courts, you cannot give that as evidence here. I will just check: is this before a court at the moment?

**Ms Dawson:** Not that I know of.

**CHAIR:** It has been resolved or they were not caught?

**Ms Dawson:** They have been caught but, because they are youths, we do not get updated on the resolution. I do not believe so. It was over a year ago.

**CHAIR:** Is it still with the police, do you know?

**Ms Dawson:** No.

**Mr RUSSO:** There is no guarantee that just because it happened 12 months ago it has been dealt with, Chair.

**CHAIR:** I understand. What have the police told you, if anything?

**Ms Dawson:** Nothing.

**CHAIR:** Did they say words to the effect that they were dealt with under the Youth Justice Act or anything like that?

**Ms Dawson:** No. Literally five days after the incident happened was the last communication we had with the police and they had been caught.

**Ms FARMER:** Chair, I wonder if we can hear Sarah privately.

**CHAIR:** Yes, actually, let's do it that way. Out of an abundance of caution, we will close the session and allow you to give that evidence. That means everyone will have to leave the room, I am afraid, for five minutes or so while we hear that evidence.

**Proceedings suspended from 2.25 pm to 2.36 pm.**

**VIOLLO, Ms Marie, Private capacity**

**CHAIR:** I invite you to make a statement to the committee.

**Ms Viollo:** On 7 July last year at approximately 3.30 in the afternoon this Indigenous boy and girl came into my shop to look for formals. Soon after, this other Indigenous girl wearing a green headscarf came in throwing constant punches and insults at the girl. When she got to my counter she grabbed two buddhas and hurled them at the girl, smashing one and damaging the other. I screamed, 'Get out!' and headed out to call security. She followed me and punched me in the back of the head with a knuckle full of metal rings causing a seven-millimetre haematoma. She then returned and punched me in the face, knocking me down to the concrete floor. I sustained bruising and a piercing from the rings on her finger that caused bleeding that would not stop for a few hours after the impact. I normally clot quickly, so the puncture was quite deep. I am 72 years old and had had a knee replacement just eight months previously. The fall backwards hurt my back and knees and I have had pain ever since. All this is on camera and witnessed by staff from the other shops. I was hospitalised and the trauma will be with me for the rest of my days.

She was picked up from a picture, so she is a known offender, and charged with serious assault on a person over 60. All she received on sentencing on 13 August was 40 hours of community service, no conviction recorded. She does not even have to pay anything back for the \$200 buddha she busted. It was like receiving another blow to the face. The sentence is grossly inadequate and offensive to me as an elderly person. The message here is clear: we the people do not matter. This girl should have gone to juvie for at least three to six months. She is violent and does not look or act like a minor. The punches she was throwing were professional boxing punches. She is trained to fight. All her knuckles were weaponised.

Not long before this, I was leaving one afternoon and witnessed an Indigenous boy on a bike steal a woman's purse as she was putting her groceries in the car. They come into the shopping centre in groups and grab armfuls of clothes and run off. Security cannot touch them. We need to have consequences for these youths committing serious crimes. Some need to be locked up. I think putting them to work out in the wilderness or planting trees or helping farmers and some kind of rehabilitation program to make them feel useful is necessary for long-term solution. This judge has made a mockery of justice and my pain and suffering. After that assault I no longer feel safe in my workplace, fearing it can happen again anytime, without any reason. I am now in the process of shutting down my business of 13 years.

Hard Yakka has had a 90 per cent success rate for rehabilitation of young offenders. Geena Court has looked into establishing one in the area. It is run military style, providing much needed discipline that these youths have not received. Halfway houses are taking up much of our financial resources and achieving nothing. I believe these camps should be set up everywhere to work on helping these children fit into society and address their anger issues. The Voice is dangerous and promotes racism. I notice that while they were promoting that Voice the violence escalated and the attitude of the Indigenous people was very aggressive. We cannot afford another divisive affront on society. It only causes violence and resentment to grow. I hope the trauma I was subjected to was not in vain. Thank you for your consideration.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for coming along and giving us your story and your experience. We received a lot of submissions from people who are against the bill and against increased sentences and spoke of trauma on the children involved. Can you comment on your ongoing trauma for having seen what you see as injustice?

**Ms Viollo:** I think the way the courts are treating them just makes them go out and do it again. There are no consequences for them. Why should they change their behaviour when nothing is being done to them?

**CHAIR:** How does that affect you?

**Ms Viollo:** It makes me quite angry, that I should not feel safe in my home or going out to the parking lot after work. We should not have to feel unsafe. Yes, they should have consequences. Some of them might be under-age, but certainly they are capable of much damage and murder even.

**Ms FARMER:** Marie, thank you for sharing that. I am very sorry to hear what has happened to you. Do you feel that things have gotten better since the first lot of new laws came in?

**Ms Viollo:** I find the centre has not been as bad as it was. They were coming in in groups and just stealing—out in the parking lot, huddled up all together—and it does not seem to be as bad now. I am worried about the Voice to Parliament. If he is going to introduce it again, it will bring up a lot of hatred and anger again and violence towards us.

**Ms FARMER:** I think that has been put to bed.

**Ms Violo:** Has it been put to bed? I do not know. Apparently, he is thinking of putting it out there again and that scares the heck out of me.

**CHAIR:** If we can stick to the bill before the committee. That is straying off into some other areas.

**Ms Violo:** I think, though, there has to be serious consequences. I am really impressed with Hard Yakka. I think those halfway houses are not working. It is just sucking up taxpayers' money and not achieving anything. If that money could be diverted to something like Hard Yakka, which Geena Court has worked on, I think it would help a lot. It would take these kids and make them feel—they need to feel useful. They need to feel some pride in something. I think they are just lost. They are lost.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Marie. We appreciate that. Thank you for your appearance today.

**LAVERTY, Ms Samara, Private capacity**

**CHAIR:** I invite you to make a statement to the committee.

**Ms Laverty:** I am a mum. I had two children; now I only have one. My son was 20. His name is Declan. Whilst this happened in the Northern Territory, it does bear mentioning as to what the effects of living in Cairns are. He was stabbed to death at his workplace by someone who had a 30-centimetre knife. This offender was on bail for stabbing someone previously. As a result of that, I worked extremely hard in the bail change space in the Northern Territory. On 15 October last year we had new bail laws implemented and it is now known as Declan's Law. This includes presumption against bail for any serious violence offence and makes breach of bail an offence, which it was not previously in the Northern Territory.

Two weeks ago tomorrow, another stabbing murder in the Northern Territory occurred. This triggered a recall to parliament, which I went over and attended, and it strengthened Declan's Law. This extra strengthening was based around ensuring community safety comes first before the rights of the offender. I recognise that these situations are not easy. They are multifaceted and they need a lot of work across every single aspect, from the grassroots up. This includes medical, education and legal frameworks which need to be reassessed.

How does this relate to me living in Cairns? I am absolutely terrified that I will get broken into. I have a 40-kilo Bull Arab dog. I sleep with a crowbar next to my bed. My son is still in the cremation box that I brought him home in because I am too scared to put him into an urn where the lid can be easily unscrewed, because if I get broken into—and it has happened previously—his ashes could get tipped out and I will lose him again. I have a remembrance area. I am absolutely terrified that that will be destroyed.

I also have a professional history of working in emergency services as a paramedic for almost my entire adult life. I now come from a point of lived experience in losing my 20-year-old son, who should now be 22, as well as having been the person to attend stabbing murders, declare life extinct and then give evidence in court. I have developed Declan's Voice Foundation. We will provide early intervention knife crime programs to high school students at this stage. This is an option that has been taken up as of last week with the education minister in the Northern Territory and will be rolled out, hopefully, as of term 3. This is something I have spoken about to people here in Cairns, and my next goal is to try to get it into high schools here.

Queensland is almost as scary as Darwin and Alice Springs are right now. Too many years of the soft approach just simply has not worked. The community is being held hostage. We lock our windows, we lock our doors, we sleep with crowbars and we sleep with wasp spray. Historical trauma is absolutely valid. However, it cannot be a reason for those people to continue terrorising the community, because that is what it is. We are all being held hostage in our homes because we are scared. As Ms Ketchell earlier noted, it is a small minority of youths committing these crimes and it is sad. These kids have so much potential from day one. These kids deserve early intervention and to be provided with wraparound services to become the amazing people they can be.

I recognise there are a huge number of things to change, but how much more should we be expected to deal with and be locked in our homes? There are no deterrents and there are no consequences and, as a result, all of these kids are missing out on valuable growing-up time, being kids and learning to become amazing adults.

**CHAIR:** Can I say how sorry I am for your loss. I commend your bravery and your advocacy and what you have achieved in the Northern Territory and for coming here today and giving us that story and advocating for victims of crime. All I have to say to you is that I appreciate that and thank you for coming along. If there are any members with questions, can you indicate?

**Ms FARMER:** I think we would all reiterate the chair's comments: it is very, very brave of you.

**Ms Laverty:** I now wear this ring, which is a ring Declan wore when he died. I have a ring that has his ashes and hair and I wear his hair with me all the time. My biggest goal out of everything I have done is for no other parent to go through this, for no other family to hear those words, 'He was stabbed and he died,' for no other sibling to grow up without their fighting partner and for no other friends to lose their mate. One of his best mates joined the Police Service in Queensland as a result of this. At the end of the day, I am scared I am going to lose my son again.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Samara. Thank you for your advocacy. Well done.

**CONTI, Ms Perri, Private capacity**

**CHAIR:** Perri, is your matter before the court?

**Ms Conti:** I am actually not going to mention it.

**CHAIR:** You can speak broadly about the laws et cetera, just not about the offence. I invite you to you make a statement to the committee. If I pull you up, it is because you are straying into sub judice.

**Ms Conti:** Okay. I am here today on both sides of the fence. First of all, there is absolutely nothing for victims. It does not get your belongings back. It does not give restorative justice. It gives you nothing for damage to your property. It does not give back loved ones. It does not bring you peace or justice in any way. Today I am here as a victim of crime to tell you my experience with the QPS, the court system and restorative justice. It has been a great learning curve, knowing the difference between an adult break-in and a child break-in. It has been frustrating and a disappointing experience, to say the least.

I was out of the country at the time of my break-in. I received a call from the local police officer asking me what was stolen. How am I supposed to know what is stolen when I am on the other side of the world? The officer made me feel like I was the criminal because I did not have cameras and I was made to feel it was my fault. The officer was rude, unsympathetic and judgemental. Kids do not care about cameras so why should I waste my money installing them? I was not given a QPS number until five days later, when I had to ask for it. I have been to the police station 15 times now with regard to my case. It took 16 days to send me an email of the list of things recovered, which was only four things. I gave all the information of who had my things, where they were and their names. Nothing came of it. There was one adult and four kids involved in my break-in and two other properties.

Since 3 March I have had two phone calls and three emails from the police. I do not know who was in charge of my case. I do not know who was the arresting officer. Do you think this is acceptable? I do not. I found out on 5 May that there were 17 officers attached to my case. It is like victims do not matter. There is no victim support officer unless yours was a heinous crime. Regardless, all victims should be able to talk to a victim support officer to navigate the broken juvenile court system. If I did not do all of the detective work, I would not know a thing. I managed to get all their names. I asked numerous times for court dates and I was ignored. It was not until I sent an email to the Premier's office about my concerns that I received a call from a police officer on a Sunday. He told me he would personally get in touch with the detective and get him to call me. He did not call but sent me an email seven days later.

My first court case was 3 March. It just goes on about my court cases and what I have been through. It is an absolute disgrace. I have sent numerous emails to government ministers only to be ignored. This is unacceptable from a minister and reflects poorly on the Crisafulli government. So many people I have spoken to in Cairns have the same issue with regard to a lack of response. It is the responsibility of the elected government to respond to people's concerns in a timely fashion. We had the same problem with the previous government and it seems to us that nothing has changed. We the people voted because we wanted real change. I can appreciate that change takes time, but so far it is the same BS and the same stakeholders telling you what they think you want to hear.

The only thing missing in all of this is common sense. You put the time into the eldest child and the younger siblings will follow. I have found this time and time again with the kids I work with. I do not think people or government are really interested in talking to people like us who do not have university degrees because, really, what would we know? We know what is best for our community and how to fix the youth crime problem, but you are not listening. I believe the newly released statistics are incorrect. Crime in Cairns has increased. Compare statistics on stolen cars: in March 2025 there were 254; in March 2024 there were 219.

We have good solutions, and this is what I am proposing for our community. We are proposing the Mungalli educational learning centre, based on the Missouri approach, with a 12-month minimum program. The approach uses a variety of group treatment techniques to help youth develop new behaviours, skills and social competency and incorporates trauma informed principles, recognising that trauma can play a significant role in the behaviour of juvenile offenders. The approach helps youth and contributes positively to the community. We also need in the approach drug rehabilitation and mental health assessment. We already have found a property and we could have it up and running in six months.

We know that detention centres do not work so we have to think outside the box. A significant number of youths who have been through the Missouri approach do not return to the juvenile system or enter adult prisons. The program is being rolled out through the USA and Europe. They have seven per cent recidivism and we have over 95 per cent. Detention centres still have a place in society

for kids who do heinous crimes. They need specialised rehabilitation to see if they can change or be part of society. In Western Australia they run a drug program that has a 98 per cent success rate. Why do we not have programs like this?

We want to do in-home family support. As most of these kids come from single-parent families, we want to run the program Monday to Friday, with weekends as family time. We want to go in, help get the kids ready for school, teach the parents to make budget-friendly meals, teach them how to navigate the system with doctors, dentists, psychologists—whatever is needed. Single parents get two free days a week of day care. All parents need me time and that lessens the stress factor—happy family, happy kids. We are asking for special classes attached to schools to re-engage kids with school. We are asking for one-on-one mentoring for bullies in schools. How can you make a change if do you not understand crime? Have any of you ever sat down and spoken with any of these kids?

**CHAIR:** I was a police officer for 33 years.

**Ms Conti:** But being a police officer is different. They will not engage with government. They hate police. We could go on and on. You have to sit down. It took me six months to figure out why they were doing crime. It was not until I sat down and said, 'What can we do for you and how can we help?' It was in that moment I understood. For that reason, I set up a youth hub.

**CHAIR:** I appreciate you have quite a few pages there. In terms of fairness and the time we give you, we have already hit the 10-minute mark. Can you wrap up for us and then we will move to questions.

**Ms Conti:** I want to mention what we are going to have in place. I have been a victim of crime twice, so I decided to set up a youth hub for kids doing crime. I want to help the 79 repeat offenders because everyone wants to do early intervention, and that is the easy part. We are going to run programs like a domestic violence education program for young boys and girls; a program for young mothers; a program for young girls, teaching them self-worth. In educational programs we have music, art and sewing. We will be collaborating with a driving school. We have kids interested in joining the Navy cadet program. We have basketball, table tennis, movie nights and camping and it will be set up as a reward system.

I did this on my own. I did not do this with government funding. I did it. I borrowed money. I bought a building to set this up because I believe this is what the kids need.

**CHAIR:** Thanks for your presentation today and thanks for bringing those ideas. In my 33 years in the police, I spent 17 years running a police citizens youth club with programs for kids, so I have a big understanding of the area you are talking about. I appreciate your ideas and I encourage you, as programs are rolled out, to apply for grants if you do need funding.

**Ms Conti:** But to me it is not about the money; it is about the care of the kids.

**CHAIR:** Absolutely.

**Ms Conti:** It is about victims. Victims are forgotten.

**CHAIR:** I appreciate you coming to talk to us about those ideas today. In relation to your lack of service from the police, I encourage you to go through the complaints process and have that looked at. That would be the exception rather than the norm in my experience, thankfully, but I am sorry that you did not get good service from the Queensland Police Service. You should follow that through with a complaint, I would suggest.

**Ms MARR:** I do not have a university degree and I have been a single parent since my daughter was six. I have had the opportunity to speak with juvenile criminals, so I do appreciate your frustration when you think some of us do not do that. You spoke about a lot of things that we are actually trying to implement at the moment. Are you aware of the tender process for the rehabilitation and early intervention programs that we have out currently?

**Ms Conti:** To be honest, I am not interested in early intervention. I want to help the hardcore kids no-one wants to help.

**Ms MARR:** But you made a comment that we are not doing anything in that space. I want to let you know that we are. What we are trying to do is make sure we get programs that work and that are results driven. I congratulate you for wanting to do it without going to government for funding because some of the time that is where we have the mistake: people go for funding for programs and they do not have results. I congratulate you and thank you for your contribution to the community.

**Ms Conti:** The whole point is that if you get the eldest child and you turn him, the young follow. It is just common sense.

**Ms MARR:** There is a lot that you said that I agree with, absolutely. Thank you for your time.

## **HOLLINS, Mr Humphrey, Private capacity**

**Mr Hollins:** Good day, committee. I think this is the third hearing I have been to and crime is still worse in Cairns. The statistics under this government, just like the previous government, are fiddled around with. We know in North Queensland we are suffering more. I have been a victim of crime twice this year.

I would like to talk about the judicial system. About three months ago I began attending the Childrens Court, just as an observer. The second time I went, I was sitting in the waiting area watching the kids carrying on with the NGOs who look after them and the lawyers who look after them. There was lots of laughing and joking. The kids wear hats. They wear hoodies. A kid was seen high-fiving one of their NGO minders. No-one tells them to respect the system: 'Sit in the corner and shut up'; 'No!'

Three months ago, the second time I attended court, a security man approached and said, 'What are you doing here?' I said, 'I'm here to observe. The state government encourages us to see justice be done.' He said, 'You'll have to leave the building or you'll be arrested.' I said, 'Okay, on what grounds?' He said, 'There's a law that says—and I have googled it—you can't be on state government property without a lawful excuse.' I said, 'I'm here to observe.' He said, 'Out you go.' I was thrown out. I have subsequently had an apology from the court and an apology from the Attorney-General.

I have returned to the court several times to do with people I know being involved in the justice system. I actually got to see a child in court on 29 February. I believe I am the first person in Cairns, the first representative of a victim or a victim themselves, to actually get into the court. It took about two or three minutes. The boy was on video link. When we finished, I said to the magistrate, 'But what about the other two offenders?' He said, 'There aren't two more.' I said, 'Yes, there are.' He said, 'No, there's not.' Okay. Subsequently I have been back to the court several times. I went three times last week to see two offenders. Once again: obstructed, lied to, ignored. In three days I never got to see the children in the court.

I went back to the court today to see an adult be sentenced, a boy of 18. He had had 21 incidents with youth justice. He was on a youth justice—

**CHAIR:** Has that matter been dealt with today? Is it finalised?

**Mr Hollins:** It was dealt with today. It is all over. He was on a youth justice order. He has just turned 18 and has another 52 offences. His Legal Aid lawyer spoke to the court for 45 minutes and he used precedents from way back in the past as to why this young man should receive a suspended sentence. Sure enough, he got an 18-month suspended sentence for 50-something offences since he turned 18, which I think was in January. There is absolutely no satisfaction for the victim whatsoever.

There was a restitution claim. It was much less than what was stolen. The eldest boy who was in court today took the laptop and the brand new iPad to a house that the police subsequently raided. Of course, he sold them to a drug dealer for probably a bit of ice or something, maybe a minimal amount of money. The restitution was divided by five because there were four children and one adult. You cannot get restitution in the Childrens Court. Why should a victim be deprived of 80 per cent of their restitution because the magistrate does not realise that you cannot get restitution from a child? The system is terrible.

I was assaulted two months ago. I visited the police station five or six times to see if there has been any result, but not yet. There is nothing. They told me it all takes time. I was knocked unconscious. I had to go for a CT scan. I had headaches for a week. It was a younger man. It is a very serious charge in Queensland, assaulting someone over 60. I am 73. I was thrown on the road.

**CHAIR:** Is that currently before the courts?

**Mr Hollins:** No, nothing has happened.

**CHAIR:** Are you saying that no arrests have been made?

**Mr Hollins:** No arrests have been made. Two witnesses have been interviewed but nothing else has happened. It does not matter whether you are a victim of a home invasion, a car theft or an assault.

I am quite unique in this room today because I was a juvenile car thief. We stole about 50 cars, I suppose, when we were 15. We went to the best school in New Zealand. In the end, they caught about 10 of us. Those other eight guys probably stole 50 cars between them, too. We all came from white, middle-class families. We all got six months loss of licence and no suspension recorded. Not one of us ever stole another car. That was in 1967 or 1968. I know why kids stole cars. We stole cars because we loved them but we never damaged one car. We never raced the police—we did not want to see the police. We never did anything outrageous. We just loved cars but we would steal four or five at a time and race them around for a week. We would literally race them.

**CHAIR:** I acknowledging your frustration with the system et cetera, but I draw you to the bill before us today. In terms of increased maximum penalties for juveniles for a variety of offences, do you welcome those changes? Acknowledging your frustration with the judicial system, do you welcome those changes?

**Mr Hollins:** The problem I have is that adults do not get adult time. You cannot put a kid in jail for 14 years when an adult who does the same crime does two or 2½ years or whatever. I think it was just a trite election slogan. It has had zero effect on the children. They do not care, even if they know or understand the laws.

I watched the kid on the screen today and the magistrate was trying to explain procedure to him. He had no idea. Of course, he left school in year 9. He does not understand what is happening in the court. He has no idea. For heinous crimes perhaps he would. Otherwise, educate these kids and rehabilitate these kids. I am a carpenter. Give them a trade. There are plenty of trades you can do without education. You could be a painter or a ceiling fitter or a gyprock flusher. You make money and you have a dog and a ute. We have to rehabilitate and train them. I think maybe 80 per cent or 90 per cent can be saved, but for 10 per cent it is too late.

**CHAIR:** What do we do with those repeat recidivist offenders, do you think?

**Mr Hollins:** With the worst ones, I would just lock them up. I do not care. I never used to be like this until I came to live in Queensland 10 years ago.

**CHAIR:** Do you recognise that the increased penalties are for the recidivist offenders?

**Mr Hollins:** Correct.

**CHAIR:** Do you support that or not?

**Mr Hollins:** I have to say yes, except that they are not applied to adults. Adults get the most ridiculous sentences for heinous crimes.

**CHAIR:** As I said, I acknowledge your frustration with the system.

**Mr Hollins:** I understand the independence of the judiciary versus politics. I understand all of that. We have FIFO police; we need FIFO magistrates. That is what we need. Pick the toughest magistrates and fly them in.

**CHAIR:** There being no further questions, I thank you, Mr Hollins. We appreciate your time

**LINCOLN, Mr Maxwell, Private capacity**

**CHAIR:** I invite you to make an opening statement for the committee.

**Mr Lincoln:** I wish to pick up where Marie started, with Hard Yakka. Years ago I was called up for national service. The platoon marched in 30 of us and there was the good, the bad and the ugly—and there were a few ugly ones there. The Army smoothed everybody out. Some people came out of the Army with a trade. Everyone came out disciplined. The other thing with the Army is if that if you mucked up there was instant discipline: confinement to barracks or a fine. It was sudden. There was not a prolonged time between the crime and going to court, with adjournments and so on. It was sudden death almost in the Army.

The other thing with the Army for the underprivileged people who came in with me—I was 20 years old—is that it provided comfortable beds, a roof over their heads, warm clothes and proper food. That is the baseline, Maslow's pyramid of priorities—shelter and food—and that worked wonders. I will not talk too long because other people are waiting to talk. We had a kleptomaniac there, a bloke who impersonated an officer and a bloke who thought he did not have to bathe, but he got the sandsoap and scrubbing brush. Everyone smoothed out and they came out as upright, staunch soldiers. I came from a pretty well-disciplined house; it was sudden punishment, with a whack around the backside. I believe Hard Yakka would do wonders. If a 13- or 14-year-old kid is found guilty, he does not go to a detention centre with hardened criminals; he goes to where there are guidelines and comfort, but there is discipline as well.

I could talk for quite a while but I will not. I am just going to share a couple of ideas with all of you. I am in the public transport business. I have driven buses and taxis and now I drive a community car around town. Day and night I work with First Nations people, Torres Strait Islanders and white Aussies. Some of the things I see around town are pretty ugly, like taking kids home but mum or dad is at the poker machines until 4 am. Also, I quite often pick up NDIS people and I ask, 'Where are we going?' and they say, 'I'm going to the bottle shop and back.' That comes off their NDIS account. Bottle shops are open until midnight and poker machines are open until 4 am. All around town there is a proliferation of fast-food joints. To my mind, from my observations and from talking to parents, this is part of the root cause, particularly poker machines. I had a close family member who was a pathological gambler and they lost \$200,000 because you can just walk in and gamble the money. The kids then have no food so they go out and nick a car or steal things like a laptop to get drug money. I am going to be pretty frank. Maybe if the poker machine times were cut back and access-to-liquor hours were cut back—all of these sorts of things—we would see a move in the right direction.

The other thing I want to share with you, which I have considered a lot, is the Singaporean model, where kids get the cane and adults get the cane. You drop your strides and it is six strikes for stealing a car. It is not going in front of the magistrate and then it is adjourned, adjourned, adjourned, and then you steal more cars and then you are found guilty. It is corporal punishment. I put that proposal forward. I will close now because there are other people waiting. I could talk for quite a while. I do want to liaise with some of you after this on private terms over a cup of coffee because I have two or three pages of things that I could share. I will wind up now. Thank you for your attention.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for bringing your ideas here. The community has a lot of ideas in terms of what we can do. Broadly speaking, in terms of the laws that we are bringing in and the bill before the committee today in terms of increased maximum sentences for young offenders, would you support that or not?

**Mr Lincoln:** It depends on the nature of the sentence. It is no use putting a 16-year-old in the slammer for 10 years and he just knocks around with hardened crims and then comes out. That is where I would say to cane him and then put him in Hard Yakka for a year rather than a longer period of time. That is how I would see that.

**CHAIR:** There are no further questions, so thank you.

**POPOVIC, Ms Maryanne, Private capacity**

**CHAIR:** Welcome. I invite you to make a statement to the committee.

**Ms Popovic:** I am going to give you a bit of background about myself, how actions of other people have impacted my life and my family's life and what solutions I think should be pushed forward, because you are the ones who need to do it. I was born and bred in Cairns, so I have lived in Cairns all of my life and I have reared my children in Cairns. I was born to hardworking, uneducated parents who worked as farmers and labourers. Most of my childhood was spent dressed in hand-me-downs or hand-me-ups but never my own clothes. Most of our diet was whatever my parents could afford; a lot of the time that was just offal or what I would call pet mince now. I am not blaming my parents or my family; I want to give you background so that you understand how hard my life has been. I am sure I am not alone; I am sure there are a lot of people who have had a hard childhood, a hard life. I am one of those. As for my adulthood, I worked in low-paying jobs—funnily enough, one was at Westpac bank and another was for another financial institution but they were still low-paying jobs—while I sole-parented two children of my own. I scrimped and I saved my wages and I built my home of 25 years.

I want to talk about the offences of juvenile youths that have impacted me in my home. Kids broke into my home. I did not know who it was at the time, but somebody broke into our house at 4 am. My dog alerted me to it while I was sitting on the toilet. It happened five minutes after my daughter drove off to the airport, so they were watching our house. The door was closed but not locked because she was coming back in 20 minutes. While I was at home sitting on the toilet, three people broke into my house, stole whatever they wanted, ran back down the backstairs and dropped a mobile phone. I called the police because I knew something was wrong as the dog was going crazy. The police told me that it was probably just the wind that had blown the door open. It could not have blown the door open because it was sucked in.

The police finally did come about six hours later, and the only reason they came was that I called them back and I said, 'I found the phone that they've dropped.' They came to collect the phone—not to see me, not to make a report about the stolen property from my place, not to do anything about the break and enter. They ended up sending a forensics guy, who told me after I handed in the phone and they checked the phone that it was a phone that had been stolen from a shopping centre the day before. They had video evidence of who the three kids were who stole it so they knew exactly where they lived and who had done it.

The forensics guy told me that they were part of the catch-and-release program. They had been released from the Cairns watch house at 2 am and had broken into my home at 4 am. He could not tell me exactly who it was; all he could tell me was that there were photos on Facebook of the shop that had lost their staff's mobile phone the day before. He tiptoed around telling me that my house was being watched and to take precautions for myself to defend my own safety because there was nothing much more the police could do. He saw that we had just painted our house and told me that if I wanted the house fingerprinted it would stain the fresh paint. That is when he said to me that the children were between 10 and 12 years old, that they were of PNG descent and that they had been released from the watch house at 2 am.

I knew that the people living directly across from my house were PNG, with kids ranging in age from two to 17 who were under curfew from the police because they had so many repeat offences. It did not take long to figure out who had been through my house, particularly when the father—who was on a perpetual drink-driving fine and had a breathalyser on his steering wheel—borrowed tools off me and I found one of our stolen pushbikes in their backyard.

I have repeatedly asked for Cairns Regional Council, prior to Amy's time, and Ergon and the police to increase street lighting in suburbs like Manunda, Manoora, Earlville, Mooroolool and Parramatta Park—a lot of the older suburbs where the street lighting is so poor. As I go on, you will understand why this is important. The department of housing rents a privately owned duplex in my street—a street which has only about 50 houses—and one side of that duplex has been the bane of our existence for over 20 years. This has been going on for the past 20 years, but two years ago a fight erupted—like it does most pension days—and the Aurukun mob were attacking each other. We called triple O. The police did not respond; there was no attendance, like usual.

My daughter was stopped the next morning by the police at seven o'clock when she was leaving home. She opened our roller gate to drive out and the police stopped her because she was not allowed to drive over the evidence of the murdered woman's clothes in the driveway of my home for the past 27 years. My daughter called that incident in the night before but the police did not come: 'They're Indigenous. They're not worth coming for. They're fighting but we're not coming.'

The people living in that street are mostly old pensioners. I am probably one of the youngest home owners who live in that street. Most of the other people who live in that street—the home owners, not the renters, who are younger than me—are older than me. I am talking about pensioners who are 70, 80 or 90. When I call Cairns Regional Council and Ergon and plead with them to please increase the street lighting year after year after year, I get knocked back but the police turn around and ask my daughter, 'Did you see what was happening on your driveway last night?' She saw what was happening and she called the police, but the police did not come. The police do not intervene—until seven o'clock in the morning, after this woman has been raped and murdered and her head is smashed into the concrete and her clothes are left on my driveway. To this day, Cairns City Council and Ergon still will not increase the street lighting.

There was a retaliation on my daughter and a bunch of the other neighbours who witnessed part of the incident of that murder two years ago. They all attended court and they gave their testimony and straight after that the Aurukun mob came and destroyed my property—bashing our gate, destroying my garden, destroying the trees and plants I had out the front, tipping over everybody's wheelie bins in the street. That was their response to their anger that we gave evidence against one of their mob killing one of their other mob.

**CHAIR:** Maryanne, I am sorry to have to wind you up. We are coming to the end—

**Ms Popovic:** I am only part of the way through one incident. Please let me go.

**CHAIR:** We are. In fairness to everyone, you have gone to the 10-minute mark now and the time for the hearing, the room booking et cetera, has reached an end so I will invite you to conclude, if you can, in the next 30 seconds or so.

**Ms Popovic:** Can I please just have another five minutes? Please bear with me. This incident that I am telling you about is my daughter's incident. The next incident I am going to tell you about is my incident. My daughter could not come today.

**CHAIR:** Maryanne, I invite you to make a written submission to us for the committee to consider.

**Ms Popovic:** I do not think it gets heard. I think for all the writing I have done it does not get heard.

**CHAIR:** I agree with you it is important that you be heard today, along with the other witnesses, but we do set time limits and we do have time limits we have to adhere to. We have given you 10 minutes at this point in time. Written submissions do get published. If the committee decides to accept the late submission, we can have that published as well so it is published publicly so it will be heard. I will have to ask you, if you can, to wrap up. I will give you a minute to wrap up, if you can, please.

**Ms Popovic:** I am going to skip to my incident: 11 April 2024. Last year I was assaulted by three banshees at my home and my workplace. I shifted from that disaster zone that I had for 27 years. I have now been in a different house for three years. I work from home on Mulgrave Road. It is the main street of Cairns. It has more than 100 cars drive past every minute of the day. On the street I was attacked by three banshees. The only person who stopped was a kid on a scooter who called an ambulance for me because my phone had been smashed to smithereens—into tiny little pieces and totally destroyed. That is my work phone and my personal phone. That is my everything. One of the people who assaulted me was arrested; the other two who were there were not arrested. A different person was arrested who did not have anything to do with it. I do not know if he had outstanding warrants or something else. I believe he is doing time up at Lotus.

My injuries included black eyes, busted cataract lenses, busted ears and TMJ joint, fractured teeth and chipped teeth, neck and back injuries, fractured wrist, fractured ankle, twisted knee and ligament injuries—other than the damage to my gate, my property and my phone and my glasses that I was wearing on my eyes at the time. I have emotional, physical and personal trauma from this—the flashbacks. This has had a financial impact on me. Being self-employed, where I am not government funded, if I do not work I do not make ends meet. Out of the three people who assaulted me, one was arrested because she admitted to it but has spent every other court appearance extending and extending her bail to not appear.

**CHAIR:** Is this currently before the courts because, as I indicated before, we cannot talk about it.

**Ms Popovic:** This is—

**CHAIR:** Is this particular person on remand at the moment, on your understanding?

**Ms Popovic:** Nothing happens. Every time I go to court and every time I call the police or the prosecutions office to get an update on any of what is going on, I get nothing.

**CHAIR:** Your evidence is important. I am loath to pull you up, but we have run out of time well and truly and I do invite you, please, to write to us so we can consider accepting and publishing that.

**Ms Popovic:** Can I just say—I am not going to talk about my incident—can I just say the bill—

**CHAIR:** I do need to wind it up.

**Ms Popovic:** Your bill has to stop judges from the catch-and-release program they are running. Unless you stop the judges, unless you make the judges accountable, this game just keeps on happening.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for your submission and thank you for your evidence today, but I am going to have to wrap it up. I am terribly sorry. I invite any witnesses who do not feel as though they were heard sufficiently today to please put your further submissions in writing for the consideration of the committee. I will end the hearing there. That concludes this public hearing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public hearing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 3.34 pm.**