

Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025

Submission No:	33
Submitted by:	Reuben Richardson
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

Subject: Submission on the Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025

Dear Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025. I commend the government for acknowledging gaps in the current youth justice framework and proposing amendments to address community concerns. However, based on my review of the bill and its supporting documents, I believe further refinements are necessary to ensure the legislation meets Queenslanders' expectations for safety, fairness, and effectiveness. Below, I outline my observations and recommendations.

1. Sentencing: Aligning with Community Expectations

The bill proposes increasing maximum sentences for certain offences from 7 to 14 years, which is a step toward addressing community calls for tougher penalties. However, I am concerned that sentencing practices may not reflect these changes. Historical data suggests youth rarely receive the maximum 7-year sentence, and recent reports indicate sentences remain lenient. For example, a case reported in the Townsville Bulletin (20 March 2025) described a 16-year-old pleading guilty to 31 offences, including serious assault and car theft, receiving only 2 months' detention, 4 months' probation, 20 hours' community service, and no recorded convictions.

This outcome fuels community frustration, as evidenced by widespread calls on local MPs' social media for minimum sentencing requirements, particularly for recidivist offenders. I urge the Committee to:

- Provide data on the number of youth receiving 7-year sentences in the past decade and any changes since the 2024 legislation.
- Clarify whether minimum sentencing has been considered and, if not, why it has been overlooked despite public support.

2. Addressing Root Causes of Youth Crime

While the bill strengthens penalties, it does not adequately address the underlying drivers of youth offending, such as unstable home environments, parental neglect, or state care deficiencies. To design effective interventions, I recommend:

- Conducting a survey of detained or formerly detained youth to explore their motivations, the deterrent effect of proposed changes, and the root causes of their behaviour.
- Evaluating the role of state care in youth offending, including accountability measures for state agencies when youth in care offend.

Without tackling these root causes, punitive measures alone are unlikely to reduce crime rates sustainably.

3. Detention as a Deterrent

The assumption that detention deters youth crime may be flawed if external conditions—such as poverty or unsafe homes—are worse than detention facilities. If detention is perceived as a form of “social housing” accessed through crimes like car theft, it risks incentivising rather than deterring offending. I ask the Committee to:

- Provide evidence on whether detention conditions have changed since the 2024 legislation and their impact on recidivism.
- Explore alternative rehabilitation models that address youths’ living conditions to prevent detention becoming a preferred option.

4. Parental Accountability

Parental neglect and chaotic home environments are recurring themes in youth crime discussions. The bill misses an opportunity to hold parents accountable for fostering safe, disciplined households. Equally, the state must avoid undermining reasonable parental authority, as overly punitive child protection policies can lead to youth entering state care, where supervision is often inadequate. I recommend:

- Introducing measures to support and enforce parental responsibility, such as parenting programs or sanctions for neglect.
- Reviewing policies that penalise reasonable parental discipline to ensure they do not inadvertently escalate youth into state care.

5. Financial Implications

The explanatory notes for the previous bill provided limited detail on costs, and I am concerned about the financial burden of the proposed amendments. With youth detention costing approximately \$1 million per youth annually—compared to a \$30,000 annual pension—innovative solutions are needed. I support exploring low-cost alternatives, such as the Katter’s Australian Party’s (KAP) proposed relocation sentencing, which could rehabilitate youth while reducing expenditure. I request:

- Updated cost estimates for the bill and strategies to optimise resource allocation.
- Consideration of cost-effective rehabilitation models that prioritise long-term outcomes over short-term incarceration.

6. Detention Capacity

Prior to the 2024 legislation, Queensland’s detention centres faced overcrowding, with youth often held in unsuitable watch houses. It is unclear whether capacity has improved since then. The KAP’s relocation sentencing proposal could alleviate pressure on facilities while offering youth a fresh start in new environments. I ask the Committee to:

- Provide data on detention centre utilisation rates before and after the 2024 legislation.
- Assess the feasibility of relocation sentencing as a dual solution for capacity and rehabilitation.

7. Need for Ongoing Review

To ensure the bill addresses Queensland’s youth crime crisis effectively, regular evaluation is essential. The proposed amendments lack accompanying data on the impact of the 2024 legislation. I request the Committee provide:

- A comparison of sentences for “adult crimes” before and after the 2024 legislation, including average sentence lengths.
- Victimisation and offending rates pre- and post-2024 legislation.
- Current detention centre utilisation levels and their adequacy.

A comprehensive review will help determine whether the bill aligns with community expectations and delivers measurable reductions in youth crime.

Conclusion

The Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025 is a positive step, but it requires further refinement to address sentencing disparities, root causes, detention effectiveness, parental accountability, costs, and capacity. By incorporating community feedback, data-driven insights, and innovative solutions, the government can create a youth justice system that is both effective and equitable. I look forward to seeing how the Committee addresses these concerns and welcome the opportunity to engage further.

Sincerely,
Reuben Richardson