

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

Submission No: 37

Submitted by: Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation

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Submitter Comments:

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14th April 2025

Re: Submission on the Making Queensland Safer Bill Amendment 2025

Dear Committee Secretary,

We, the Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation have reviewed the *Making Queensland Safer Bill Amendment 2025* and hold concerns for the effectiveness of these measures in reducing crime and supporting victims of crime. Our young people and their families in our communities are exposed to higher levels of violence than the broader populationⁱ and therefore it is critical that government listen and act with humility and courage to ensure all future generation of Australia have the best chance of success and prosperity. Many of the young people we work with that show recidivist behaviours have been victims of crime in their earlier stages of life and received very little to no therapeutic support. We have many stories we can tell that demonstrate the harm that is caused when entrenched systems designed are utilised for political gain, many like Amelia's story:

Amelia* is a young Aboriginal girl who was referred to us by child safety when she was 12 years old. Amelia was moved between placements and programs with no consistent safe adults spending enough time with her to build rapport and meaningful working relationships. As a result of the trauma she experienced during her early years, Amelia struggled to regulate her emotions, understand consequences of her actions and was often wandering the streets at night. (Other than Child Safety residential placements, there are no emergency accommodation options for young people under sixteen in Cairns). Child Safety were unable to respond and support Amelia with a place of safety or accommodation, so our service was forced to "safety plan" Amelia to homelessness on the street. While out at night, Amelia connected with other young people who had lived through similar instability and trauma. Wanting to feel a sense of belonging and control over her life, she joined them in stealing a car. After being arrested, Amelia was held in an adult watchhouse, where she was held in a cell next to adults where the atmosphere was loud and traumatic. Amelia became distressed, shaking and crying. She feared for her life. The nearest youth detention centre is 4 hours away from Amelia's home and is often at capacity with young people waiting on remand. Under this new bill a young person like Amelia could be held in these conditions for months prior to sentencing. Once sentenced, Amelia was transported to the youth detention centre where she is isolated in a cell for 23 hours a day. Amelia was only permitted to leave her cell for exercise, fresh air and sunlight for 1 hour in a 24-hour period.

Amelia was not eligible to attend the school program at the detention centre due to her lack of impulse control and inability to regulate her emotions. There is no therapeutic support for Amelia to learn emotional regulation or rehabilitate in the detention centre. During her time in detention, Amelia experienced frequent lockdowns, largely due to the practice of housing young people withdrawing from substances alongside those on remand. This created a consistently volatile and unstable environment, leaving little to no room for meaningful rehabilitation. Upon release, Amelia returns to self-place at her mother's home where no meaningful or positive change has occurred. Amelia does not feel safe however she continues to self-place with her family because she loves her little brother and wants to keep him safe and despite her mother's condition, she loves her. Amelia wonders why there is no help of support for her mother. Amelia continues to move between her mother's home and multiple Child Safety placements, still without access to the therapeutic support or psychological interventions she desperately needs. Without this foundation of care, her behaviours persist, and each stint in detention only deepens her sense of powerlessness and disconnection from herself and the world around her. At this point, Amelia is so disheartened and worn down that she struggles to name even five hopes or goals she wants to achieve. The weight of constant disappointment has made it hard for her to believe that change is possible. Amelia tries to commit suicide and self-harms, she uses cannabis to help her to relax the anxieties that she feels being a 14-year-old trying to process deep emotions whilst being in a residential care facility that will never feel like family. After three years of consistent support, Amelia disclosed the harrowing experiences of being molested and raped by a family member at the age of 12, followed by repeated instances of being drugged and raped by a non-Indigenous community member. It took three years of consistent support, until Amelia was finally assessed for Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Receiving the diagnosis brought her a sense of relief, as it helped her make sense of many of her challenges and understand the importance of engaging in therapy. All of these supports were delivered while Amelia was living in the community, not while she was in detention. Amelia has been charged with over ten offences, including car theft. Under the proposed bill, she could be held in detention for up to fourteen years. There is no guarantee that she would receive any therapeutic support or psychological interventions during that time. There is also no evidence to suggest that detention would support her healing or rehabilitation. In reality, the evidence points to the opposite^{ii iii}, and we would be lucky if she is still alive at the end of that sentence.

If Amelia grows into adulthood without learning how to regulate her emotions, without ever receiving therapy for her trauma, and while still believing she is powerless and unworthy, what kind of future will she face? What happens if she has children while still carrying the weight of her unaddressed pain and trauma? What trajectory will her children follow?

More importantly, how could this story have been different?

More support for victims of crime We urge the government to increase targeted support for victims of crime including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children who have

experienced rape, domestic and family violence, and sexual abuse. Including culturally safe, trauma-informed therapeutic care and greater accountability on government bodies to implement these interventions.

Emergency housing for young people under 16 No child should be left without a roof over their head because the system cannot respond in time.

Culturally safe, community-led alternatives. We have long advocated for the establishment of an integrated youth hub and a Healing Centre, grounded in “The Village” model. This approach is built on cultural values and community connection, offering therapeutic support not only to young people but to their families as well. Such a model could play a crucial role in supporting young offenders—providing a space for healing, accountability, and a gradual, supported return to community life. Our communities hold the solutions. What we need is genuine partnership to bring them to life.

We want to be clear, as described in our previous submission, that we do not support the punitive measures included in this bill and believe sentencing a child as an adult will have devastating effects on our young people, families and our communities. Adult sentencing in centres that are clinical and not fit for purpose will increase the level of powerlessness our young people already feel over their futures and result in an increase in an already high rate of suicide.

We accept that the current government has no interest in implementing our solutions or listening to the voice of our young people in turn we ask the government to at least take into account these suggestions to minimise the devastating effects of detention.

We ask the government at the very least provide:

A Local fit for purpose centre that young people that have no alternative could stay until they are sentenced. We do not support the clause to legally keep young people in the watchhouse for extended periods when there is no alternative. The bill should hold government accountable to provide a fit for purpose centre where young people can have access to holistic therapeutic care for themselves and their families and be supported to detox safely. Including a provision for funding and support for young offenders of Cape York and Torres Strait families who wish to see them return to community and reside with other family members (if this is in the best interests of the child).

Data transparency and accountability for detention and remand centres, specifically Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. We ask that the bill include a section that collects and makes available data of the number of therapeutic supports made available to young people who have been sentenced and the number of lockdowns and hours they are released from their cell. We ask the government to recognise that the section in the bill that allows for young people to spend the day in the detention centre and be returned to the watchhouse will not

apply in our area therefore by approving this bill they will likely be providing Queensland Police with legal powers to abuse the human rights of children.

We know from lived experience, from working every day with our young people, that the current system is not only broken—it is dangerous. If these reforms go ahead without substantial changes and parallel investment in community-led, culturally safe alternatives, we fear the worst.

We implore the Committee and the Queensland Government to listen to the voices of young people, families, and communities and have the courage to act.

Yours sincerely,

Merrissa Nona & Stacey Ketchell
CEO & Chairperson of Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation.

*We have changed the name of the young person to protect their identity.

ⁱ ABS, Recorded Crime – Victims, Cat. No. 4510.0, June 2010, pp. 38-9

ⁱⁱ Chen, S., Matruglio, T., Weatherburn, D., & Hua, J. (2005). The Transition from Juvenile to Adult Criminal Careers. *Crime and Justice Bulletin: Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice*, 86.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dodson, M., & Hunter, B. (2006). Selected Crime and Justice Issues for Indigenous Families. *Family Matters*, 75, 34–75.