



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

21 January 2016

Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Committee Members,

Submission re: inquiry into the Youth Justice and other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod is pleased to present our submission to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee inquiry into the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. The Uniting Church in Queensland supports all the proposed reforms to legislation.

The Uniting Church in Queensland congratulates the Queensland Government for their commitment to making significant and positive reform to the youth justice system. We look forward to contributing to future development in youth justice policy and genuine reform of the sector.

Alongside the formal programs of counselling, crisis lines and support programs for youth and vulnerable families provided by Uniting Church agencies, our churches have many points of contact with young people. From that experience we have learned that some young people will stray into crime but, with the right support, can make a new start and become valuable citizens. The Uniting Church in Queensland is confident that the proposed reforms to youth justice legislation will help children and young people to have access to the assistance they need.

Our proposal

We recognise that historically it has been difficult for any government to achieve substantial progress in this area. No single department or service provider, working alone, can “solve” this complex problem.

Ongoing and meaningful collaboration, particularly with the youth sector, will be critical in creating a youth justice system that genuinely reduces the involvement of children and young people in the justice system rather than entrenching them within it.

We believe that these complex problems require a fresh approach based on collaboration and a clear understanding of the purpose of the youth justice system. Is it to punish young people and their families, or to rehabilitate them? Another priority must be to consider how to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the criminal justice system.

We urge the Government to embed approaches that are *specifically designed* for working with complex issues, multiple stakeholders and differing perspectives, in developing youth justice policy.

We therefore propose a Government-hosted cross-portfolio, cross-sectoral workshop to inform youth justice policy reform. The workshop proposal is co-sponsored by the Anglican Church Southern Queensland, the Uniting Church Queensland Synod and Queensland Churches Together (representing 16 Queensland churches and Christian communities) and is supported by members of the [Balanced Justice](#) coalition¹.

The proposal is consistent with the Attorney-General's desire to *encourage true participation from people at every step of the process*, and helps to build ownership across the community for the youth justice reform agenda.

We remain deeply concerned by the high rates of incarceration and other contact with the youth justice system among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. We recognise that the problems contributing to these high rates are complex, including a lack of suitable housing and bail options. We believe that consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leaders, Elders, organisations and young people is fundamental to effecting improvement. We urge the government to include significant representation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the workshop outlined above.

We believe that an opportunity now exists for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General to implement a truly collaborative policy reform process that reflects the complexity of youth justice and provides a welcoming space for new ideas and innovation.

Yours sincerely



(Rev) David Baker
Moderator

¹ Balanced Justice, <http://www.balancedjustice.org/>, accessed 19 January 2016.