

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 12 March 2021 9:12 AM
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Subject: Submission opposing proposed changes to the Youth Justice Act (1999)

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12 March 2021

To Legal Affairs and Safety Committee of the Queensland Parliament

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Submission opposing proposed changes to the Youth Justice Act (1999)

I am a Townsville resident who is very concerned by the proposed changes to the Act which are based on the central principle that the community “should be protected from serious recidivist offenders”. This clearly conflicts with the Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that any legislation affecting children must operate in the ‘best interests of the child’.

Children involved in the youth justice system are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in our community who need help and support rather than harsher punishment. Many of those who continue to re-offend exhibit behaviour suggesting mental health problems and cognitive impairment. Research in WA has documented a high prevalence of FASD and severe neurological impairment in young people in detention and the need for improved diagnosis to identify their strengths and difficulties and to guide and improve their rehabilitation.

The changes also ignore Queensland’s own Human Rights Act which clearly states that a child who has been convicted of an offence should be treated in a way that is appropriate for the child’s age. The objectives and principles in the Act should be about keeping children out of detention except as the very last resort, and to address the underlying causes of crime.

Several of the proposed changes involve strengthening bail laws. Past experience suggests that this will result in watch houses and prisons overflowing. I understand that the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre is already operating at maximum capacity. I believe that the government needs to consider what actually works to reduce recidivism rather than rushing through measures such as the use of GPS tracking devices, which are not supported by evidence based research.

It is disappointing that some positive changes that have been made in the youth justice area in Queensland are now in danger of being reversed so the Government can be seen to be “tough on crime”

I urge the Queensland government to invest in well-resourced indigenous and community led diversion and prevention programs that address the underlying causes of youth crime and create safer communities for all of us.

Jenny Brown

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