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Submission in response to proposed amendments to the Youth Justice Act 1999

As a member of the North-West Brisbane community, Amnesty Chermshire group and a mother of a ten-year-old, I am deeply concerned by the proposed amendments to the Youth Justice Act 1999 particularly those relating to bail.

I am horrified by the deaths of three innocent people and an unborn child in Redland and Townsville this year in incidents involving young people driving stolen cars and understand why the Government wants to act decisively but I strongly believe the changes proposed will not prevent this kind of tragedy occurring again.

While high incidence of mental illness, disadvantage, trauma and prejudice remain for these young people, this kind of behaviour will continue. The Director of QLD Youth Affairs Network has called for an evidence-based approach to reform, stating that the youth sector is underfunded and wrap around services which are needed to work in conjunction with bail laws are not in place (InQueensland, February 8 2021). Investing more in the youth sector would begin to deal with the root of the problem rather than the band-aid solution of tightening bail laws. Early intervention for young people when they first start getting into trouble is needed to prevent the slide into serious and repeat offences down the track.

Additionally, youth crime has decreased in our state as reported by the Queensland Government - to be celebrated. This is likely the result of the reforms the Government has made in recent years such as making detention of young people a last resort and keeping children out of watch houses. These were positive steps towards keeping children safe. When I heard about the proposed changes and the way they were presented, I felt very disheartened

as improvements had been happening. I would like to see child safety made a top priority in any further changes to the Youth Justice Act 1999.

Referral to diversionary programs including on-country initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Cairns, Mount Isa and Townsville funded by the Queensland Government make a difference. Programs as above have likely also contributed to the falling crime rate. Similar programs are needed across the state including ones suitable for metropolitan areas. Some young people may miss out on such programs if the changes to the bail laws pass, deepening the cycle of crime and incarceration.

With the proposed changes, there is likely to be an increase of young people in detention in Queensland at risk of harm, of re-offending and of further incarceration in a system unable to provide the support and protection they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed amendments to the Youth Justice Act 1999.

Yours faithfully,

Ruth Gould

Co-Convenor Chermside Amnesty International Group