



March 18/03/2021

Submission to the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021

Commerce North West would like to make a submission to the Queensland Government with regards to the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. The information contained here was presented in person at the hearing in Mount Isa on March 16th. We can only speak to the effects that juvenile offenders are having on the local business community.

Young recidivist offenders are responsible for a large percentage of property crime in Mount Isa. Local business people and residents are frustrated by this growing problem and the failures in the systems that are preventing meaningful long term solutions.

In January 2020, we conducted a survey of our members specifically asking them about property crime that they had experienced. Key findings from this survey are:

- 92% of respondents said they had been a victim of property crime at their place of business. Over two thirds of these had experienced three or more separate attacks.
- Damages in excess of \$1000 were common. 13% experienced losses over \$10,000. The highest amount listed was \$50,000.
- Property crime occurred throughout the year. School holidays did not have any affect.
- Just under half of respondents reported ongoing emotional and mental health problems as a result of these attacks.
- 91% reported the crimes to police but only 25% made insurance claims.

Some of the written comments we received that are relevant to this bill are:

"Restorative Justice council is not addressing the problem...The judicial system needs to be more accountable for the way it delivers penalties."

"People are trying to help, but nothing is changing because these specific group of kids offending aren't being dealt with."

Since we completed the survey in 2020, the situation has deteriorated further. Just two examples of this are:

- One of our members within the accommodation hospitality industry, has been targeted by youth crime 13 times this year alone as of 28th February, 2021.
- Another member who owns a local Pharmacy has had \$40,000 worth of building damages in the last 5 years directly related to youth crime and vandalism. They are no longer able to claim this through their insurance.

From conversations we have had with the local police, victims of crime and service agencies, we know that there are really only about 30 to 40 young offenders who are responsible for the majority of the crime. Some of these children are as young as 8 years old and they are completely unafraid of being caught either on camera or in person. The usual procedure is that once they have been apprehended, they are released on bail and reoffend almost immediately. Those who do get sent to detention find it a positive experience in general with a safe space, comfortable bed and regular meals. This is in stark contrast with their family situation and so does not serve as a deterrent.



The issues surrounding these recidivist youth are many and complex. Some are due to the breakdown of the family unit. For some, there is a disconnect between themselves and their indigenous culture. For many, their families and role models are equally dysfunctional meaning they don't know any other life. Rehabilitation programs need to be able to address not just the offender in isolation but their families and communities as a whole.

In order for the amendments to the bill to have any real effect, it needs to address

- The underlying issues that give rise to the dysfunctional families through whole family rehabilitation services.
- Rehabilitation services need to be made available to offenders not just after they have been sentenced but during the remand period as well.
- Rehabilitation services need to have a strong cultural component especially for young indigenous offenders. This would aim to develop a sense of pride and connection with their culture to lead to a desire to make different life choices.
- Any moves to strengthen bail conditions needs to include measures that can and must be applied to very young offenders.

As the regional chamber of commerce, we can only comment on the issues as they affect our members. Property crime is having a significant detrimental effect on the local business community and we are keen to find long term effective solutions. We commend the government for seeking to address the issue and encourage the government to legislate in a way that allows for place based and culturally sensitive solutions rather than blanket, band-aid style approaches.

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