

Youth Justice Reform Select Committee inquiry into youth justice reform in Queensland

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Committee Secretary, Youth Justice Reform Select Committee

Parliament House

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Via email: youthjustice@parliament.qld.gov.au

December 5th 2023

Re: Youth Justice Reform Inquiry

I welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Youth Justice Reform Inquiry ('the Inquiry'). Our Amnesty Group has been involved in the Raise the Age Campaign this year and I have attended various meetings with other groups involved. We also recently showed the film 'Backtrack Boys' with its innovative response to children at risk of exposure to the courts. I support the Inquiry's goals to examine ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime.

Early Intervention

Incarcerating children is not keeping our communities safe. Queensland detains more children each day than any other state and has the worst recidivist rate in Australia. 1 95 percent of young people that go to Cleveland Detention Centre allegedly reoffend within the year of their release. 2 The earlier a child is exposed to the justice system the more likely they are to reoffend. 3 I believe that to keep the community safe, the Queensland Government should remove children younger than 14 from the justice system and invest in services and supports. Early intervention programs in Queensland support children and make communities safer for everyone. 4 Unfortunately, the Queensland Government is underfunding community led programs focused on prevention and diversion. 5

1 Productivity Commission 2023, Report on Government Services 2023, Part F, section 17: released 25 January 2023, Table 17A.26.

2 Queensland Government. (2022). Response to Question on Notice, No. 859.
<https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tableoffice/questionsanswers/2022/859-2022.pdf>

3 Sentencing Advisory Council (2016). Reoffending by children and young people in Victoria (p. xiii).
https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Reoffending_by_Children_and_Young_People_in_Victoria.pdf

4 Justice Reform Initiative. (2023). Alternatives to Incarceration in Queensland. (pp.18 – 27).
https://assets.nationbuilder.com/justicereforminitiative/pages/337/attachments/original/1685393777/JRI_Alternatives_QLD_FULL_REPORT.pdf?1685393777

5 Queensland Council of Social Service. (2023). QCOSS: Queensland budget analysis 2023-2024, Investing in Queensland's Youth Services. <https://www.qcoss.org.au/publication/state-budget-2023-2024-our-analysis/>

Respond to root causes

Children in the justice system have often experienced trauma, including being victim/survivors of domestic and family violence. There are high rates of disability and neurological conditions among children in the justice system. Many children in the justice system are from communities characterised by poverty and entrenched disadvantage. 6 , 7 Currently, the needs of children and the root causes of problematic behaviour are not adequately addressed.

First Nations led solutions

The Inquiry must explore First Nations designed and led initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to reduce overrepresentation in the justice system and to ensure Queensland meets its Closing the Gap justice targets.

Children out of watch houses

Watch houses are not appropriate for any young person. The Queensland Government must urgently get children out of watch houses, reduce the number of young people in detention and fund an alternative to the justice system for all children younger than 14. The alternative must be evidence based, trauma informed, culturally safe, therapeutic and non-punitive.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Evelyn Williames

Amnesty Ashgrove Group