

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

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Ms Sandy Bolton MP
Member for Noosa
Chair of the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

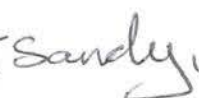
TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL
ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
103 WALKER STREET

PO BOX 1268, TOWNSVILLE
QUEENSLAND 4810

TELEPHONE 07 4727 9201

enquiries@townsville.qld.gov.au
townsville.qld.gov.au

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

Dear Ms Bolton, 

RE: Submission to the Youth Justice Reform Inquiry

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission into the inquiry into youth justice reform in Queensland.

It is my firm view that there are a complex set of reasons behind the youth crime epidemic facing many Queensland communities at the moment, and similarly, youth criminals are engaging in a variety of behaviours that cause distress and fear amongst law-abiding citizens of this State.

Sadly, the city of which I am proud to be Mayor, Townsville, has been at the heart of the youth crime issue for many years, and has been subject to the behaviour of these criminals long before it became a central theme in the political discourse for the rest of Queensland.

I want to recognise that the Government has made some initial steps in an attempt to address the youth crime crisis, however, it is important that further actions are taken to bring the youth and adult sentencing regimes in Queensland into line with community expectations.

Similarly, there are a number of issues that I believe the Government needs to address, including the use of residential care facilities to accommodate people with a history in the youth justice system, as well as the tightening up of policy design relating to the vehicle immobiliser trial.

I have five main submissions that I believe this inquiry should recommend to the Government to implement.

Removal of detention as a last resort

I would advocate for the Parliament to repeal provisions in the youth and adult sentencing frameworks that contain sentencing as a last resort.

This will remove one avenue for magistrates and judges use to avoid issuing sentences commensurate with public expectation.

Mandatory sentencing of youth and adult offenders found guilty of certain offences

I would like to advocate for the Queensland Parliament to provide mandatory minimum sentences of twelve months' detention for a number of offences, in order for rehabilitation programs to have some actual effect.

The offences that should carry a mandatory minimum sentence are:

- Unlawful use or possession of a motor vehicle (Criminal Code s408A)
- Robbery (Criminal Code s409)
- Attempted robbery (Criminal Code s412)
- Assault with intent to steal (Criminal Code s413)
- Demanding property with menaces with intent to steal (Criminal Code s414)
- Burglary (Criminal Code s419)
- Entering or being in premises and committing indictable offences (Criminal Code s421)
- Possession of things used in connection with unlawful entry (Criminal Code s425)
- Unlawful entry of vehicle for committing indictable offence (Criminal Code s427).

Relocation sentencing for youth offenders

I would like to express my wholehearted support for the policy position adopted by the Members for Traeger, Hinchinbrook and Hill. The ability for youth offenders to complete a mandatory sentence in a setting where there are no distractions such as social media and mobile phones, as well as gaining important life and work skills in a rural setting, will genuinely rehabilitate them.

Investigating the ability to complete a trade while on-country would help re-instil a sense of purpose in youth offenders and give them a way to re-integrate as functional members of society after their sentence has been served.

It is important that relocation sentencing be undertaken in an area far away from Townsville or Cairns (more than 400km), so that the ability for peer pressure is eliminated by geographic distance.

The use of the residential care system to accommodate persons with a history in the youth justice system

There is a prevalence of persons with a history in the youth justice system who are, after their time of detention, placed into State-run or State-funded residential care homes, which should be restricted to their intended use of caring for young people in genuine need of support from the State.

Mixing people with a history in the youth justice system with vulnerable young people is unfair on the vulnerable, and criminal activity associated with offenders living in these residential facilities stigmatises those who do not deserve it.

I advocate for the banning of placing persons with a history in the youth justice system into residential care facilities, except as a last resort. I urge the Government to investigate ways to incentivise the placing of young offenders with family or kinship guardians as a matter of priority.

Refinement of the engine immobiliser trial

In December 2022, the Palaszczuk Government announced \$10 million for a trial of engine immobilisers in regional Queensland cities most impacted by vehicle theft – Cairns, Mount Isa and Townsville. The program allows residents of these cities to access a \$500 voucher for use towards the installation of engine immobilisers for their vehicles.

While a number of Townsville residents have accessed this voucher, there is a large disparity between the number of people applying for the vouchers and the number of people actually getting the immobilisers installed.

My view is that the Government has not adequately explained that this system is not for a “free” engine immobiliser, but is actually a \$500 voucher towards the cost of purchasing and installing the devices.

I am also of the view that the Government has not adequately engaged with the vehicle insurance industry to link the installation of engine immobilisers with a reduction in car insurance or compulsory third party insurance premiums.

Finally, due to the dearth of accredited suppliers in Townsville to install immobiliser devices, it is necessary to extend the use-by dates of the \$500 vouchers past 30 June 2024 to allow for maximum uptake of this trial.

Adequately addressing these three issues with the trial would, in my view, increase the uptake of the scheme and would have a material impact on reducing vehicle theft and cost of living pressures on Queenslanders.

Thank you once again for providing the community with the opportunity to make a submission.

The issue of youth crime is the number one most pressing issue facing our State at the moment, and I urge the Legislative Assembly to act rapidly to address it.

Townsville residents – and all Queensland citizens – deserve to feel safe in their own homes and without fear that their possessions will be stolen.

Similarly, their rights should be upheld and considered as a priority, over the rights of offenders with scant regard for law-abiding residents of this State.

Yours sincerely,



Cr Jenny Hill AM
Mayor of Townsville

CC:

- Hon. Yvette D'Ath MP, Attorney-General, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence (attorney@ministerial.qld.gov.au)
- Hon. Mark Ryan MP, Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services (police@ministerial.qld.gov.au)
- Hon. Di Farmer MP, Minister for Employment and Small Business, Minister for Training and Skills Development and Minister for Youth Justice (youthjusticeandemployment@ministerial.qld.gov.au)
- Hon. Craig Crawford MP, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Seniors and Disability Services (cssd@ministerial.qld.gov.au)