

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

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Submitted by: [REDACTED]
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Dear Committee, I recall some discussion in the public hearing on Thursday, 23 November 2023 about the number of 'serious repeat offenders' increasing since 2018. There has been much discussion about whether the responses to serious repeat offenders are working. There are very few serious repeat offenders under 12 years of age. This means the serious repeat offender age bracket is about 5 years. This, in turn, means the serious repeat offender cohort from 2018 has not increased - it has passed through to the adult system, and we now have a whole new cohort. That today's cohort is bigger cannot be due entirely to failed responses to young people who are serious repeat offenders - it must be due to failures before those young people even reached the age of criminal responsibility. As Professor Walsh advised on 24 November 2023, '...this measure of serious repeat offender is... very highly correlated with the adverse childhood experience measure. What we are talking about here is exactly the same cohort of children. The children who have the most adverse childhood experiences also tend to be the ones who fall into that SRO cohort.' (transcript, p.6) I'm sure you are aware of the extensive body of evidence on adverse childhood experiences and their long term effects. This is the key to reducing the number of serious repeat offenders, and their offending. It is of course essential to respond to our current serious repeat offenders with evidence-based interventions and supports, but those responses are challenging, costly, and far less effective than prevention and early intervention when the children are much younger - even before they are born. We could have noticeably fewer serious repeat offenders in five years than we do now, significantly fewer in 10 years, and almost none in 15 years, if we make good decisions now. If we keep arguing and blaming each other about what happens to young people who are already serious repeat offenders, we'll be missing the point, and things will continue to get worse, regardless of who wins in October. As I noted above, the right responses to current serious repeat offenders are still important, and should be covered in your report; but as a Committee you have a unique opportunity to produce a bipartisan, evidence-based report about what works to reduce youth crime in the long term. The evidence about that is clear. Only a report that looks at the long term will properly deliver on your terms of reference 2 a and b. I wish you well with your critically important work, and I look forward to your report.