



Speech by

KAREN STRUTHERS

MEMBER FOR ARCHERFIELD

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND PENALTIES AND SENTENCES AMENDMENT BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Archerfield—ALP) (8.58 p.m.): I rise to oppose the Corrective Services and Penalties and Sentences Amendment Bill 1998. I do not oppose what the member for Warwick is trying to achieve in terms of safety, but the strategies are misguided and valuable dollars will be misspent.

Everyone wants to live and raise their kids in a safe community. Ideally, we would all like to live without fear of being assaulted or violated. We would like to sleep with our windows open, rather than spend thousands of dollars putting steel bars on them. However, we do not live in an ideal world. Violent crimes continue to be committed daily. Even though offenders make up a small core within our community, the impact of their vicious crimes hits us all.

I have spent many years working to get domestic violence taken seriously—for it to be seen as a crime, not a private family matter. I have worked hard to ensure that the full force of the law came down on the cowards who assault their partners. Ten years ago, very few were punished. Police were reluctant to intervene. Times have now changed. Many of these violent offenders now do time in jail.

I have also worked with others to reform rape laws. Traditionally, many rapists have been acquitted or received relatively light penalties. I support the view that violent offenders—whether their crimes are committed against family members or strangers—must be locked away. I do not support the view in this Bill that offenders be locked away for the full term of their sentences with no incentive to rehabilitate themselves.

I would like the members of this House to think about some possible scenarios. Consider offender A. I will call him John. John has been a successful businessman. Generally, he has been a good family man and a good bloke. He had no reported criminal history. That was until last year when, in a drunken rage, he assaulted his wife. She fell over a balcony and is now a paraplegic. John's sentence: 14 years. Do we give blokes like John incentives to rebuild their lives, or do we harden them and risk that they will offend again? Changing the attitudes and behaviours of offenders will help to make us all safer, not producing hardened and bitter reoffenders. Not all offenders have the capacity to be rehabilitated, but by supporting this legislation we are cutting off early parole incentives for all people.

Don is the second offender. He is 55 years old. He has lived with his wife for 20 years on a small property in regional Queensland. He was well known as a kind, respectable community member. He was also a well-regarded National Party member. He has also just received a 14-year prison sentence. His crime? He could no longer cope with the period of unemployment he had been enduring. He could no longer cope with the threat of repossession of his property and equipment. He broke into a neighbour's property. When the neighbour leapt at John, he was startled and fired his rifle. His neighbour was shot dead. I ask again: do we want first offenders, such as Don, to be locked away for 14 years—again with no incentive to rebuild their lives? Or do we need to take the individual factors into account and be given genuine options for rehabilitation?

The third offender is Jenny. She is 18 years old. She became addicted to heroin whilst at boarding school. Her family are wealthy, successful graziers. She has always been seen as a good kid. Not now. Jenny got hooked up with a young con man who encouraged her to join him on a car theft scam. To make quick money for her heroin habit, Jenny joined in the scam. Things went tragically wrong. Jenny drove a stolen car. She was off her face on heroin. She killed a school-age child. She also got 14 years for her drug and other offences. Again, I ask: do we give Jenny every opportunity to

get off drugs, rebuild her life, repay her debt to the community, or do we throw away the key for 14 years? My guess is that each of us will come to know a John, a Don or a Jenny—someone who is a first-time offender but who, through a range of circumstances, ends up committing violent offences.

Incentives for parole within the corrective system enable offenders who have a capacity for rehabilitation to pursue that vigorously. Without this option, we overcrowd our prisons and spend billions of dollars at the wrong end of crime. Instead of giving priority to this Bill, the member for Warwick would do well to focus on crime prevention. Our Government is doing just that. We want to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. We have developed a comprehensive crime prevention strategy. This is the way to go. Crime is complex. We need wide-ranging solutions. We will be safer, and we will feel safer, when we prevent crime from happening in the first place. We need solutions that tackle the complex factors that underlie criminal behaviour, not gimmicks or short-sighted grabs for a quick fix.

I call on the member for Warwick to be clever. He is said to be clever. I call on him to be creative in combating crime. This Bill is not clever. It is not an effective tool to fight crime. I say to the member for Warwick: put the talents that you are said to have to the front end of crime, not the back end. This Bill should not be supported. I urge all members to work actively towards creative and effective solutions to our crime problem, not gimmicks.
