



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Juvenile Offenders

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt— Australian Labor Party) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (10.17 a.m.), by leave: An extensive reform program in the area of juvenile justice began in the first term of the Beattie Labor government and has continued apace throughout the first 100 days of our second term.

I am pleased to announce that the Juvenile Justice Amendment Bill will be released for targeted public consultation in coming weeks in accordance with the commitment made in the February election campaign. The draft bill is the result of a review of the Juvenile Justice Act 1992, the Bail Act 1980, the Childrens Court Act 1992 and the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000 which was undertaken in order to provide clear and consistent policy and practice in youth justice in Queensland.

Among the recommendations of the extensive 12-month review was the recommendation for judges to have the capacity to name juvenile offenders convicted of heinous crimes such as murder, manslaughter and rape. The bill will also provide a new charter of juvenile justice principles that will stress, among other things: the accountability of juvenile offenders for their crimes; the responsibility of parents for the supervision of their children; and rights for the victims of crime to have a say in the process of dealing with juvenile offenders. As the situation currently stands with regard to juvenile justice issues under this government, about one in three of our juveniles who have previously been repeat offenders, and who were referred to our pilot Youth Justice Services, did not subsequently re-offend.

On 11 July this year, one of the most shameful chapters in the state's history will finally end with the official opening of the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre. It not only signals the end of an era now associated with childhood misery but also sets the direction for the future of Queensland's youth detention centres.

The Brisbane Youth Detention Centre, which forms the major component of cabinet's \$63 million, 10-year Youth Detention Centre Infrastructure Plan, is based on dual notions of ensuring security and providing opportunities for rehabilitation of young offenders and incorporates the recommendations of the Forde inquiry and the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators Design Guidelines and Standards. It was also the outcome of extensive consultations with representatives of other state government departments, such as Education Queensland, Queensland Health, the Department of Employment and Training and relevant community organisations.

The centre was completed on 9 January 2001. The construction program was compressed to 34 weeks and was undertaken by Watpac. Generally, a project of this size would have taken approximately 42 weeks to complete. The total capital budget for the new centre was approximately \$44 million. However, despite the compressed timetable, we were determined not to blindly repeat the mistakes of the past.

Let no-one be under any illusion about the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre. Young people are punished for their offending by being placed in detention and being deprived of their liberty. They are also given the opportunity to become responsible young Queenslanders, which is a major investment in our society's future. The design and operation of the centre has a 4.5 metre high perimeter fence with electronic surveillance and internal security systems that combine active staff supervision and the use of electronic equipment.

Young people's activities are closely observed, and there are serious sanctions for misbehaviour and transgression of rules. Equally, it is recognised that many of the resident young people have serious deficits in education, pre-vocational training and self-management, which must be addressed if they are to contribute successfully to the community upon release. Therefore, facilities must be provided at the centre for appropriate education, training and recreation. The Forde inquiry said that—

Children and young people in care should expect to receive adequate education, vocational training, general and mental health care, leisure and recreation, contact with the community and family and a range of programs that prepare them to function independently and risk-free upon discharge.

Neglect of these needs places young people at great disadvantage for the rest of their lives.

This centre has an on-site registered school managed by Education Queensland that has been designed to local high school standards that apply in the community. The classrooms are not airconditioned. It also has designated areas for the provision of training in industrial arts, horticulture and construction, art and home economics, which have been built to normal community standards. Facilities such as the swimming pool, sports hall, music room and sporting field are used for teaching in areas such as teamwork, literacy skills, lifesaving and physical education.

An opposition member: What's the point?

Ms SPENCE: Detention centres in Queensland and interstate have had such facilities for many years.

There have been some misconceptions about the centre's operations which need to be laid to rest; that is the point. Last week a local radio station broadcast an anonymous email from a police officer who said he was 'amazed at the facilities available to the little grubs who were fortunate enough to be incarcerated in this magnificent facility'. The more things change, the more they stay the same. I was able to locate in our files—

Mr HORAN: I rise to a point of order. It has been one of the fair systems in this place that the other side of the House is given a reasonable amount of time to make private members' statements. It is now 25 past 10. We have another minister rambling on and on and on, as they all have this morning with their statements. It is about time there was a bit of integrity in this parliament.

Ms SPENCE: I would have thought that the opposition would have been interested in the facts of the youth detention centre, given that some of them have been on radio talking about the falsehoods that have been propagated about this place.

I located in the *Courier-Mail* archives the article on the opening of the Sir Leslie Wilson Youth Detention Centre, which occurred in 1971. Here it is. It is headed 'Luxury style detention'. What we saw was the then Health Minister, Mr Tooth, looking at the new heated pool with the vacuum showing. It is sad that, after 30 years of experience and a long and very public examination of our mistakes in this area, we still respond in the same way.

The facts about this facility are simple. Young residents' units are not airconditioned, except for the officers' stations. Claims that pizzas and Kentucky Fried Chicken are purchased and brought into the centre for young people are not true. There is no delivery service. Young people access computers at the school. This is now considered a routine part of education. Young people do not have access to laptop computers outside the school.

The youth detention program has undergone a major change since 1998 and has won major commendation from the Forde Monitoring Committee. These changes have been achieved without compromise to security. The Brisbane Youth Detention Centre seeks to combine the importance of the safety of young people and staff, the protection of the community and the provision of programs that help young people successfully reintegrate into the community. But the Beattie government is more focused on developing a package of prevention programs to stop young people falling into the kinds of behaviours that see them ending up in detention centres. As a society, we cannot afford to replicate the brutality that characterised many of the old-style institutions. We must now work constructively with young offenders and the broader community to bring about the very best outcomes that we can.
