



Speech by

ANDREW McNAMARA

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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JUVENILE JUSTICE AMENDMENT BILL

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (3.33 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to rise to address the Juvenile Justice Amendment Bill before the House. In common with many other members of this place, this bill is among the most difficult of balancing acts that we as the legislature have to perform. The competing interests of helping young people in trouble, of looking after the needs of the community and balancing rehabilitation with punishment are all very seriously addressed in this bill and it is a great step forward.

As a former practising criminal lawyer, particularly practising in the Childrens Court, and as a duty lawyer I saw plenty of young kids in trouble in my time. I had a number of children who were before the courts on very serious offences—young kids under 15 on arson and major school vandalism charges; home invasions with serious assaults and grievous bodily harm; unlicensed driving and unlawful use of motor vehicles; not just using drugs but supplying drugs and in serious quantities—the whole gamut. There are young people in trouble and they need our help, but I think the balance that is struck in this bill is the right balance. The need on certain occasions to name serious young offenders was obviously picked up by Judge McGuire, and I endorse his comments. It is ALP policy and I strongly support it.

I congratulate the minister on not only dealing with this difficult issue but also moving the debate forward in this sensible way. Also, the bill picks up a lot more than merely naming young offenders. I worry that that issue has been a little too dominant in this debate. It is an important issue, but the major issue, as the member for Ashgrove said earlier, is resourcing and funding. A terrific program has just started working in my electorate—a juvenile justice program that is doing great work and has been really welcomed by the community. That is the sort of support which ensures that juvenile justice is an improving area under this government, and I congratulate it.

I want to pick up one point that was made by the member for Callide. It may never happen again for as long as I am in this House, but I want to strongly endorse what he said in relation to young children who, in many cases, have been forced to raise themselves. I saw a lot kids go before the courts, and I think it is fair to say that in the overwhelming majority of those cases they had experienced severe family disruption, a severe break in the normal parenting arrangements. They came from dysfunctional family backgrounds. I would appear in court for kids who were there to face serious charges and no parents would turn up. I do not think we can ever underestimate the importance of the background of a child as young as 14 or 15 who steals a car or bashes someone. There is a lot more at work. I certainly congratulate the minister and I congratulate the government on the resourcing that will be given over the next four years to support this program. I strongly support the bill.