



Speech by

CARRYN SULLIVAN

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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JUVENILE JUSTICE AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (2.47 p.m.): This bill will not only amend but also substantially overhaul the Juvenile Justice Act 1993 and other pertinent legislation to the juvenile justice system to provide a better, more modern and more consistent legislative basis for its administration in Queensland. It was a promise of this government to implement the Forde recommendations to improve the treatment of young people held in youth detention. Most people who were aware of the Sir Leslie Wilson centre were indeed delighted when it was demolished and replaced by the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre. This was the beginning of the Forde report's recommended changes. Some years ago I had the unforgettable, devastating experience of visiting a young teenage boy known to me in the Sir Leslie Wilson centre and I can still remember the oppressive and stark nature of the place. On his release the young boy some time later committed suicide. That is something I will never forget.

The Forde report also highlighted the need to build safer and more supportive communities that are able to tackle the problems that youth experience. Breakdowns of family relations and the wider community are contributing factors to antisocial behaviour in juveniles. Youth will commit crime, but it is up to society and governments to do everything possible to ensure that every effort is made to prevent them from becoming adult criminals and to respond to the offences committed.

Ms Keech: And parents have a responsibility, too.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Yes, parents have an extremely important responsibility. This government is going forward, unlike when the opposition was in government in 1996, under Rob Borbidge, when amendments made to the act did not provide appropriate and reasonable clarification and resulted in some further operational concerns. The member for Cunningham is wrong to suggest that this bill enhances what the Nationals put in place whilst in government.

As the Minister for Families stated in her second reading speech, the most effective approach to juvenile offending is one that enhances community safety by recognising that we must encourage the development of our young people's sense of responsibility and their development into law-abiding adults as far as we reasonably can. The old 'lock 'em up and throw away the key' mentality has long gone. It was always about as useful as an ashtray on a motorbike.

The Beattie government promised that, although it would do everything possible to ensure that young offenders were given every opportunity to be rehabilitated, the identity of the most serious, violent and heinous offenders would be published. They would no longer be able to hide under the umbrella of confidentiality provided by the Juvenile Justice Act when the court decides that it is in the interests of justice to do so. People in the electorate of Pumicestone whom I represent have raised this issue. They believe this is totally appropriate and that we are right to propose it.

Ms Keech: So have the people of Albert.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: The people of Albert agree as well. It is also imperative that there are suitable sentence options in place so that the courts can attempt to prevent young offenders from repeat offending. Currently, there is a hiatus in community based sentence options for children between the ages of 10 and 12 years. Because the age threshold for a community sentence order is currently set at 13, the only sentence option for high-risk children under this age has been probation, detention

or release from detention on an immediate release order. However, this has now been addressed in the bill by introducing the intensive supervision order, which is reserved only for those whose behaviour has placed them at risk of detention. Permitting 10- to 12-year-olds who commit crimes to get the intensive supervision they need and supporting their development into law-abiding accountable and responsible adults so as to protect the public epitomises this government's fair approach to young offenders.

Under this bill, and for the first time, a child will be able to elect to have a trial by jury in the Childrens Court of this state. This government is committed to strengthening the specialist jurisdiction of the court by eliminating a child's right to elect to be dealt with by the District Court instead of the Childrens Court. Cases will be heard more quickly and expertly because of this change, and that has to be better for all concerned. Many in the system will look forward to the setting up of a specialist Childrens Court to permit more uniformity and fairness in sentencing and more effective responses to juvenile offending.

It must be noted that this bill includes changes to the policing of children, a list of basic rights of children in youth detention centres in the charter of the juvenile justice principles, an obligation on youth detention staff to report harm suffered by a detained child, and mandatory regular inspection of youth detention centres. The use of conferencing and cautioning in juvenile crime related matters has been revised and updated. Courts will be required to consider dealing with children by referring them to a conference. Conference conveners will have a duty to ensure that the victim is notified of and invited to the conference.

This bill seeks to improve the management of young people involved in both the adult and child criminal justice systems. Court processes relevant to young people who have both adult and child offences or who are subject to an application to stand trial with an adult offender have been refined also. Precise direction is also provided about whether a young adult is to be imprisoned in a youth detention centre or in a Corrective Services facility. Consultation has been widespread amongst those groups with a working knowledge of the legislation. During late 1999 and early 2000, 11 community forums and meetings were held throughout Queensland with various interest groups, including the Victims of Crime Association, where the opportunity was given for people to get information and explanations of the major changes proposed and to provide comments and ask relevant related questions. Thirty written submissions were received on the release of an issues paper that highlighted areas of the act that had been the subject of concern. Extensive consultation also occurred between the Department of Families, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and the Queensland Police Service. I pass on my congratulations to all who worked on this bill and I commend it to the House.
