Speech by

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES BILL

Ms CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (9.28 pm): I am very pleased today to have this opportunity to rise to speak in support of the Corrective Services Bill 2006. I am proud to be part of a government that is already delivering an efficient and secure correctional system. Changes to the corrective services legislation contained in the bill before the House today not only support the innovations made by Minister Spence since she became Minister for Police and Corrective Services but also pave the way for making sure that Queensland continues to lead the way in all aspects of correctional management.

Nobody can argue that Queensland's prisons are amongst the most secure in the world. The minister should be congratulated on her approach to the containment of the state's most dangerous prisoners. Despite the success of the Beattie government on prison security, the minister has not been content to rest on her laurels but continues to improve and upgrade all forms of prison security. In July of 2005 the minister announced that security was about to get tougher, with an additional $30 million to be spent over the next five years on maintaining and upgrading the perimeter security systems of all Queensland secure correctional centres. In August 2005 the minister announced that a fleet of nine armour-plated four-wheel drive Holden Rodeos had commenced providing perimeter security at Queensland's secure jails.

Now the minister has brought into the House a bill that clearly says if people are going to break the law and end up in jail they should be subjected to tough rules and tough security measures. The bill makes it clear that when a prisoner enters jail they will be assessed as to their risk of escaping; the risk they pose to the security of the prison, to staff, to other prisoners and to themselves; and the risk of reoffending. The assessment of these factors will determine the prisoner's security classification.

At the moment prisoners classified as high, medium and low are all accommodated in high-security facilities. Prisoners classified as open security are accommodated in centres that allow them to prepare for their transition into the community. The current structure is unnecessarily complex, with prisoners of different classifications accommodated in the same centre. The new system is simple. Prisoners who are assessed as high risk due to their likelihood of attempting to escape, the risk they pose within the correctional services facility or their likelihood of reoffending will be classified as high security and accommodated in a high security facility with appropriate levels of supervision. Prisoners who are assessed as being unlikely to escape, who present a low risk within a correctional services facility and pose little or no risk to the community will be classified as low security and may be accommodated in a facility with less security and supervision. Maximum security will, of course, remain, and the most dangerous prisoners in the system will continue to be classified as maximum security and housed in maximum security units.

The minister spoke about the classification of remandees in her second reading speech and the fact that remandees currently make up a sizeable proportion of the prison population. Not all prisoners are remanded in custody because they pose a threat to the community. Many are remanded because they fail to raise a surety or because they have no suitable accommodation. The current act stipulates that prisoners on remand must be classified as high security. As a consequence of the current system, some prisoners who may not require such a high level of security and supervision are placed in a high-security

environment. This bill will enable Corrective Services officers to assess prisoners on remand according to the same criteria as sentenced prisoners. This will mean that those prisoners of low risk can be accommodated accordingly.

Another aspect of the bill about which I would like to speak today is the separation of prisoners from the mainstream prisoner population. The necessity to separate prisoners from the rest of the prisoner population has always been a feature of correctional management. It is of utmost importance that a system of separating prisoners is focused on ensuring the safety of staff and prisoners and is open to scrutiny with transparent accountability measures in place. In the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners, it is particularly important that methods for separating prisoners are used appropriately and with the appropriate opportunities for independent scrutiny.

As a key participant in the implementation of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement, the Department of Corrective Services is committed to ensuring the safety and security of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners in custody. The separation of prisoners was also raised in the 1991 Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which emphasised the need for effective measures to prevent incidents of self-harm in custody along with more open and accountable decision-making processes.

This bill introduces a clear and accountable scheme for separating prisoners from the mainstream prisoner population by replacing crisis support orders and specialist treatment orders with a single safety order. This bill provides that a prisoner may be placed on a safety order for up to one month if the prisoner is a threat to the good order and security of a prison, to keep staff safe and to keep other prisoners safe or if the prisoner is at risk to themselves. The duration of this new order will reduce the time that prisoners at risk of self-harm or those who pose a risk due to a psychiatric condition are separated from the prisoner population.

The bill also provides increased accountability mechanisms by requiring orders to be subject to review by medical practitioners and official visitors. It is important to allow for circumstances in which a doctor or psychologist is not available, such as on weekends and during public holiday periods. Therefore, there is a provision for a temporary safety order to be made for up to five days if a corrective services officer or a nurse assesses a prisoner as being at risk of self-harm or poses a threat or risk to someone else. There is a requirement that the order be reviewed by a doctor or psychologist within the period of a temporary order.

The ability to make maximum security orders remains in the bill as a response to highly dangerous prisoners. This type of measure is as tough as it gets. Maximum security units are purpose-built to hold escapees, murderers and sexual predators and other prisoners who pose an extreme threat to the prison security staff and prisoners. The bill also recognises that it is a serious matter to have to contain a prisoner in a maximum security unit so there are enhanced requirements for the independent scrutiny of maximum security orders. Maximum security prisoners will be able to request a review of that order by an official visitor, and an official visitor must review these orders at intervals of no more than three months. Provision has also been made for prisoners on maximum security orders to be reintegrated into the mainstream prison population within the period of the order, where appropriate.

I am very pleased to speak in support of the Corrective Services Bill 2006. It is a bill that supports and enhances the security, safety and integrity of the management of prisoners. I commend the bill to the House.