



Speech by

Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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JUVENILE JUSTICE AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL; JUVENILE JUSTICE (SENTENCING PRINCIPLES) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr POWELL (Glass House—LNP) (5.52 pm): I rise to address the House as part of the cognate debate on these juvenile justice bills. In terms of the Juvenile Justice and Other Acts Amendment Bill, I acknowledge that, in line with the terms of reference for the review, the bill proposes legislative amendments that cover a range of aspects, such as giving the court specific powers to place curfews; widening the court's powers in relation to naming juvenile offenders; increasing the minimum mandatory detention period for young people convicted of multiple murders; giving police stronger powers to arrest and take to court young people who do not comply with youth justice conferencing requirements, or who contravene an agreement, or who fail to attend a drug assessment session; requiring the court to consider setting a date for the transfer of offenders from youth detention to adult prison; automatically prohibiting the publication of information that identifies a child victim; reducing remand levels; updating the name of the act; and other minor amendments.

I also acknowledge and add my support to the amendments proposed by the shadow minister which are designed to complement the approach proposed in the government's bill whilst also responding to a need for community protection and recognising the victims of young offenders. Given we are debating these bills cognately, I add my support to the private member's bill of the member for Southern Downs, the Juvenile Justice (Sentencing Principles) Amendment Bill. As the member stated in his explanatory notes—

The reference to detention as a last resort has undermined the sentencing principles of deterrence and community standards that the justice system is expected to deliver.

The amendment seeks to remove this impediment to sentencing courts when dealing with juvenile offenders and inserts a new provision that ensures that courts can consider detention as a sentencing option for juvenile offenders if appropriate for the crime that has been committed.

It is clear that there is a need to strengthen this legislation. Most contributors to this debate will discuss and have discussed the research that supports widening the court and police powers in the area of youth justice. But it would also be good to look at strengthening the early intervention and prevention sector.

I would like to pick up on comments that were made by the member for Lockyer during the debate of the Corrective Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill during the last sitting. I note also that the member for Capalaba and, most recently, the member for Mirani have also picked up on this aspect in this debate. I also know that this government is always looking for ideas. It seems to be bereft of its own. So I have one for it.

I would like to refer members to Project Circuit Breaker. In my previous career I had the pleasure of coming across this fine service, Project Circuit Breaker, which is run by Mission Australia. I will refer to and eventually table a document from the ninth Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, which was held in Melbourne in 2005, titled *Developing resilience at every stage of a young person's life*. The research definitely shows that a number of factors impact on the wellbeing of children and young people.

This paper suggests that they are grouped under five broad headings of: the child's own or personal factors, family factors, the school context, life events and community and cultural factors. The research demonstrates that where a factor increases the likelihood of poor outcomes that factor is known as a risk factor. Such factors are low self-esteem, poor problem solving, a lack of empathy, homelessness, early school leaving, family violence, poor supervision, harsh or inconsistent discipline, school failure, bullying, peer rejection, divorce, death of a family member, neighbourhood violence and crime and a lack of support services. These are the factors that can start a young person or a child down the path of potentially offending. They are the factors that we have to try to build resilience against.

The research also shows that most people, including children, will experience some form of adversity or risk factor or factors at some time in their lives. It is important to build up resilience—the ability to bounce back or recover after such adversity or hard times. Resilience allows people to overcome adversities that ought to disrupt their development and even build positively on those adversities. To help build that resilience and to get a positive outcome for children and young people, we need to be looking at protective factors that promote that resilience. Some of those factors include attachment to family; a general optimistic outlook; a good coping style; supportive, caring parents; secure and stable families; pro-social peer groups; a sense of belonging; meeting a significant person in their own life; and potentially moving to a new area. Those factors also involve accessing the right support services or having access to support services, community networks and an attachment to the community. The idea is to minimise the impact of those risk factors, enhance resilience and maximise the impact of protective factors. Hopefully, all of those strategies will build a better outcome for the child or young person.

However, the research demonstrates clearly that there is no right time in which to intervene or get involved in the child or the family. The research shows that developmental pathways can change and that children who exhibit difficult characteristics during childhood do not necessarily become problem adolescents and that such a change is common. This is where a service like Project Circuit Breaker would come in.

Project Circuit Breaker is an early intervention and prevention service for families with children aged 10 to 16 years living in the northern suburbs of Brisbane. Its clients are families experiencing first-time involvement with child protection authorities or who are at imminent risk of further involvement. The project's referral networks include Child Safety Services, Queensland Health, the Police Service, the department of education, the community as a whole as well as self-referrals. In one year alone—back in 2004—Project Circuit Breaker saw some 260 clients. Project Circuit Breaker aims to enhance family functioning, improve family resilience and reduce involvement and/or a need for statutory intervention by Child Safety Services or, in this case, the Department of Communities.

It offers a range of services. This aspect of the service really makes it work well with these families. It can provide individual or family counselling, practical skill development, practical support, conflict resolution, negotiation, group work, advocacy referrals, active follow-up and community development. It is that multifaceted approach that is benefiting many of the clients who are using that service.

I acknowledge that the government has had its struggles with services such as Project Circuit Breaker and I think it is largely because of the nature of its response, which does not necessarily fit within one funding stream. I am hoping that now that many of these services have come together under the Department of Communities it will make it easier for the government to get its head around a service such as Project Circuit Breaker. The reality is that, because of its nature, it does not meet the monitoring criteria set by government. Perhaps it is time for government to be looking at other monitoring criteria, particularly around client outcomes. If one looks at this report, which I now table, one sees that they are significantly positive and worthy of noting.

Tabled paper: Document by Mission Australia, titled '9th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Melbourne, 9-11 February 2005—Developing resilience at every stage of a young person's life' [803].

I would really love to see organisations such as Project Circuit Breaker expanded to be able to deal with low-risk youth justice cases. Ideally, I would love to see it expanded so that we could get these kids in touch with a service such as this long before they ever come to the knowledge of the Department of Communities, the court system or the Police Service. I know that there are plenty of intervention services once a young person does begin offending, but we really need to get serious about heading such kids off before they do offend.

Services such as this that parents can go to for help, that teachers or chaplains can refer to when they notice that first instance of a family breakdown or a relationship breakdown between the child and their parents or the child and their peers, would be ideal. I know that there is investment in early years, but this needs to be complemented in this eight- to 12-year-old age bracket, where the first signs of relational discord tend to arise. It would be great to see services such as this expanded across the state. It would be great to see services such as this targeted in Indigenous communities offering Indigenous-specific services and also in community groups such as the pan-Pacific communities that we have in the north of Brisbane and in the Logan area.

It is my belief that a tougher youth justice bill, one that includes the opposition amendments and takes into consideration the sentencing principles proposed in the private member's bill of the member for Southern Downs, along with a more targeted approach to preventing youth offending, will achieve the desired outcomes of stronger families, more resilient young people and a reduction in youth offending and the need for detention in its entirety.