




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (5.14 pm): I rise this afternoon to speak in support of the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Bill 2014. I would like to congratulate the Attorney-General for recognising and addressing the serious shortcomings within our justice system, which is that of adequately holding young offenders accountable for their actions and particularly the need to target repeat offenders.

It is alarming to learn that in 2012-13, 10 per cent of all young offenders were responsible for 50 per cent of the offences committed. Imagine how frustrating it must be for the magistrates to see the same young offenders back in their courtroom again and again. The Newman government has made it clear that reforms to the youth justice system are a priority as part of a wider law and order focus for this government. At the last election we promised Queenslanders that we would increase community safety, and we have remained committed to that goal. The Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 introduces a number of key changes to the Youth Justice Act 1992 to create transparency in the youth justice system and increase accountability of offenders. This includes the publication of repeat offenders' names, a new offence for reoffending while on bail and removing the principle of detention as a last resort.

Last week, I asked some of my Facebook followers and some of my constituents whether they supported changes to the youth justice system and last week the need to hold young offenders accountable for their actions. The post generated a huge amount of conversation and a number of opinions and perspectives. One Facebook user said of her involvement with the youth justice system that, 'It was a complete farce. Everything seemed to revolve around hiding the young person's behaviour from the judge during numerous hearings.' Another person noted their frustrations with the lenient bail conditions for youth offenders, saying, 'I can't wait for the new laws. Maybe the young people might learn a bit of respect.'

There is an overwhelming sense in the community that the youth justice system in its current form is inadequate. It is too easy for youth offenders to reoffend without harsh penalty and there is a lack of support for those who genuinely want reform. However, rehabilitating young offenders should be a holistic approach, not just a government approach. In my electorate of Southport and the wider Gold Coast there are some amazing community organisations who are supporting vulnerable youth offenders and those at risk of offending. I want to draw attention to some of those organisations because they do some great work. They share some of the frustrations and they, too, understand that an important part of the process of rehabilitation or turning young people around is the need to provide accountability and support but with a particular emphasis on accountability and teaching them to take responsibility for their actions.

One such organisation within the Southport electorate is YHES House, an organisation that has been led by Anne Ellis for many years. They run numerous support programs for young people on the Gold Coast. They run education programs. They provide support services to homeless young people.

They provide referral and other assistance programs to young people. They do some absolutely outstanding work in this space. One of the things that they put a lot of time and energy into is working with young people to remould and reshape their future and understand the need to take personal responsibility.

Another organisation on the Gold Coast with multiple locations but one particularly in Southport is Arcadia College. The principal and director of that organisation, Andrea Lee, is a remarkable woman. She has an absolute driving passion to work with young people who, through all sorts of circumstances, have ended up on the wrong side of the law or in difficult circumstances. They run special school programs for young people who would not fit into a normal school environment. They work with young women who have become pregnant and do not have the traditional support of their families or partners, and they also work with young people who have ended up going through the justice system at some point and who need specialist care and attention.

Another group that has just come on the radar within my electorate is led by an outstanding young man called Marco Renai. His parents have been businesspeople on the Gold Coast for many years, and he now runs a series of different fitness programs and a gymnasium down on the coast. He and a group of businessmen have started running some challenge programs for young people that are a little bit like the boot camp programs that our government has implemented. It is widely recognised that if you can take young men aside and spend time working on their health and fitness, if you can challenge them a bit and if you can get in their ear and earn their trust and respect, then even the most troublesome of young people become candidates for a turnaround. The program that Marc has been running with great volunteer support down on the coast is a program called Men of Business, which challenges these young people to rise up, step up and become real men and to understand what it means to be manly and what it means to show strength and courage in respect of themselves.

The vision that Marc has is to create some special centres. He wants to build a gymnasium with some business enterprises around it. The vision is almost to create a surf club-like environment where some of these men could stay and be part of the program. At the moment they run three-month programs where these young men come and go, but they want to create a residential based program as well. The vision that they have in this space is exciting, but the thing that Marc and his team of volunteers emphasise with these young boys who have got themselves on the wrong side of the law is the concept of personal responsibility, which again is a strong theme that comes through in this new legislation.

There are some amazing people within the church that my wife and I attend, METRO Church on the Gold Coast, who run some really innovative and special youth programs within the Southport electorate on Friday nights and weekends. Ben and Sabrina Peters, the volunteer youth leaders who have worked for some five or six years within that youth program, are taking many kids off the street and working on their life skills and the need to change their thinking and to step up and take personal responsibility.

There are many troubled young people across the state. In my previous role as assistant minister to Minister Davis, in the first 12 months of this government I had the privilege of travelling around this state and visiting some of the residential care facilities and some of the other organisations across Queensland that provide specialist support to some of our most marginalised young people. Without a doubt there are many young people out there who need specialist care. There are many young people transitioning from childhood into early manhood and teenage-hood who are wrestling with their sense of self-worth and their identity and who come from very challenging and traumatised backgrounds. What I learned through that time is that some of the programs that the previous government was running which had been developed to deal with these issues really were not hitting the mark.

Through the Carmody report it is exciting to see some of the reforms that are being proposed moving forward in child safety, particularly with the focus on transition from care for young people. I believe that this legislation sends a message to those young people that we as a government are serious about them stepping up and taking responsibility for themselves. We are serious about the fact that you only get so many chances in life. While I certainly believe in the principle of grace and wanting to get alongside young people and support them, I will be the first dad in the room to remind my kids of the importance of them taking responsibility for their actions.

This has been something that both my wife and I have been very passionate about for many years. We lived in Broken Hill for a number of years, and we bought the old convent with a group of businesspeople there and converted it into a youth centre where we ran specialist programs for young people from all around Australia. We created businesses to create employment opportunities, and

one of the principles that we taught these young people was that they needed to step up and take responsibility in a normal work environment.

The changes to the youth justice system proposed in this bill support not only offenders but also their families to address the causes of their offending. We want to create a responsive justice system which focuses on early intervention and diversion, and I am proud to stand in the House this afternoon and support the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014. I commend the Attorney-General and the Premier for their commitment to community safety and their unwavering approach to getting tough on crime in this state.