




Speech By

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MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION (INCLUSION OF 17-YEAR-OLD PERSONS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr SAUNDERS** (Maryborough—ALP) (4.13 pm): I rise to support the youth justice and other legislation amendment bill 2016. I would like to thank everyone on the committee: the chair, the deputy chair and opposition members, all of the people who made submissions and the secretariat. I would also like to thank the Attorney-General, who is doing a marvellous job. This is a passion of mine, and it is really good to see that the Attorney-General has stood up for the youth of this state. I am proud to be part of the Palaszczuk Labor government that is standing here for you.

As we know, 17-year-olds are completely different. We were all 17 once. I grew up in a pretty tough area out west, and I was a pretty handy young man in my young days. I was a wild young man, but I was very fortunate because I had very good parents and I came from a very loving and good family. When we drill down on a lot of what is happening with the youth, believe you me, what we heard from those opposite was a blast from the past. I thought I was back running for Keppel in 1995 and 1998, because the then member for Keppel was the National Party member, the Hon. Vince Lester. I am sure the other side of the House knew Vince Lester well. They have not changed, because in 1998 the then member for Keppel wanted to flog kids with a cat-o'-nine-tails. He said, 'The only way we can whip these kids into shape is with a cat-o'-nine-tails.'

You should always be careful what you wish for when you are talking about the youth, because I was in my campaign office in North Rockhampton and a gentleman came in one day. He called me a few unsavoury names—which I will not mention to the House—because I did not stand up with the member for Keppel and bash these children and whip them with a cat-o'-nine-tails. I told him my position, which is that kids are kids and education is the way to go and helping families—which the Labor government always does—to make sure that these children do not run off the rails. About six weeks later when I came back to my office the gentleman who had come into the campaign office approximately six weeks before wanting to whip kids asked if he could talk to me about his grandson. This is what you have to be careful of. I asked what was wrong with his grandson, and he said that his grandson had been led astray by a bunch of other young fellows. They robbed an old lady down in Lakes Creek. I said, 'Bring him out the back of the office.' He asked, 'What for?' I said, 'I'll just get the cat-o'-nine-tails out and we'll flog him to death out on the wheel.' He changed his opinion about whipping children from that day on. He thought the Labor policy was a good idea, which was family intervention and making sure that kids are educated and making sure that we are doing the right things.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SAUNDERS: I will take that interjection from the member for Southern Downs because I have seen what happens after three years of their government. One of the things that touched me when I went to Townsville the other day—and I would like to thank the staff at the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre—was how stark it was. When we walked through I asked the staff what happens at the youth detention centre, because it really touched me when you hear some of the horrific stories from some of

the young blokes who are in the detention centre. Of course they are separated, so you are not going to get some of the harsh older people incarcerated with the young ones. The staff went through it and explained that to us, but one of the things that really touched me on that tour was how sterile everything is. When you go in there it is not warm, so if we are trying to put youths back on the right track it is not the right atmosphere. As far as I am concerned, it is not inviting that we are heading that way.

We heard the previous speaker talk about training, so I asked one of the staff members there about training and they said, 'No. That was cut. We lost all of our training under the Newman era.' I said, 'Pardon?' It took me back, because my idea as a father, a citizen of this great state and a member of parliament is that when a young bloke or a young lady goes off the rails, we train them to give them a better life and get them ready for the world outside again. It stunned me. I will not mention the officer's name because there could be retribution, but I asked, 'What do you mean?' They said, 'There's no training.' The training was cut in the youth detention centres, so we are locking these youths up in an environment where there is no training.

Members opposite talked about being worried about training. There was no training in the Newman-Nicholls era—absolutely none. The whole training facility was closed down. It has taken a Labor government to start it back up again. That has been restarted by the education department. The education minister has actually kicked that in. Those opposite sit there and say that they are concerned. I feel like we are back in 1989: those opposite just want to lock people up and throw away the key and release these youths back onto the street.

I think this bill is correct. If you go through a correctional centre—I have been through plenty in my day—

Mr Stevens: They let you out?

Mr SAUNDERS: I take that interjection from one of my old cell mates! I think we shared a cell. I have been through them in a work capacity.

Mr Stevens: You got retrained.

Mr SAUNDERS: I learned from the member opposite to read Best Bets; that is how I got retrained. I have been through a lot of correctional centres in my capacity with the Together union and in my work life. They are not friendly places. Those opposite would have people believe that correctional centres are holiday camps where people lie around on lounges and have drinks brought to them. They are not holiday camps.

One of the things that always strikes me when I walk into a correctional centre with the officers is the sound of the door banging behind me—and I am a grown man. That is not a very good feeling. By putting 17-year-olds in with grown men, especially in the male correctional centres, all we are doing is setting them up to fail.

Mr King: Criminal for life.

Mr SAUNDERS: That is exactly right: we are setting them up to be criminals for life. They do an apprenticeship in there. Our best chance of putting these kids on the right track is to utilise the youth justice system and make sure they are trained.

Through the communities minister we got a bit of money into my electorate. In this regard I was speaking to the regional manager for Act for Kids, David Swain. We have seen a difference since this government came to power in terms of the families that have been saved by early intervention. This is a credit to not only the communities minister but also the Attorney-General. Some 138 families in the Wide Bay region that were at risk of youth offending have been saved. That has occurred because the money from this Labor government has been reinvested into making sure—not only for the youth but also for the families—these kids have a future in life. It saddens me to see that those opposite are not willing to give these youths a second chance. A lot of people in society have had a second chance. I heard some horrific stories as a member of the committee. What some of these youths have seen is a bit distressing. What they have seen we may never see in our lifetimes, yet we expect those kids to bounce back with no intervention or help from the government.

Some members opposite talked about their constituents. Last year in Hervey Bay I ran into a young girl who got a second chance from a program under the previous government. She was telling me about her lifestyle. This is what we have to think about when we are talking about youths and young offenders. Every time she came home she did not have anything to eat. Every time her mother got a new partner she was sent out on to the street—at 14 or 15 years of age. This young lady has turned her life around thanks to the programs that were put place in the Bligh era. I always think of this young lady and what chance she would have had. She was living on the street, and the more she broke the law the more she felt accepted by the group of youths she was hanging around with. She never got that from home. Opposition members do not understand that—

Ms Boyd: Too privileged.

Mr SAUNDERS: A lot of them are privileged. They have not seen what we have seen. They do not understand that these youths are not born like that. We as a government and as citizens of this state and this country have a moral obligation to make sure these youths—

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SAUNDERS: The interjection of the Southern Downs helps us to understand why they think that way. We saw his actions when he was a minister of the Crown. I do not have to go into that, but—

Mr Springborg: What, cutting the dental waiting lists in Maryborough?

Mr SAUNDERS: I take that interjection. You cut it down because of federal intervention. You got the Gillard money. I can tell you that now because I have the facts and figures to prove it. That was all Gillard money and you took credit for it.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Linard): Member for Maryborough, I ask that you direct your comments through the chair.

Mr SAUNDERS: Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. Their comments upset me. This is a very touchy subject. When I see the attitudes of those opposite, it is no wonder the state was in such disarray for three years. It is no wonder people could not wait to turn them out.

Mr Mander: Twelve more months.

Mr SAUNDERS: I take that interjection—

Mr Mander: Six months.

Mr SAUNDERS: It does not matter how long it is because they will not get back into government. The people have had enough of them. We have seen the attitude of those opposite here today. We, as a committed government, are trying to talk about the youth of our state and the future of our country, yet those opposite want to go back to the days of bringing people in in chains and tying them up.

As I did earlier, I congratulate the Attorney-General because she has done a wonderful job. She is standing up—someone has to—for the youth of this state, because those opposite would not stand up at all. I commend the bill to the House.