




Speech By  
**Dr Christian Rowan**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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**YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015; YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2016**

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (11.46 pm): I rise to address the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. Before I do that, like the member for Broadwater I take this opportunity to pay my respects and offer my condolences to the family of British Labour MP Jo Cox given her shocking murder—a crime really of unspeakable evil not only against her and her family but also our democratic institutions. Regardless of our political persuasions in this House, we are elected to represent our communities as best we can, to cherish our freedoms and our values and to do good from how we view the world. It is unthinkable for a member of parliament to be going about their business on a daily basis and seeing constituents and to suffer that. It is certainly hard to imagine what her husband and her children are going through at this time and also the British public.

I oppose the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 due to the fact that the evidence based amendments made by the former LNP government in 2014 have not had a chance as yet to deliver to their fullest extent. Also an appropriate review of the 2014 amendments has not to date actually taken place. Mr Michael Shanahan, the President of the Childrens Court of Queensland, in his annual report of the Childrens Court of Queensland for 2014-15, noted that there was an overall decrease of 8.7 per cent in the number of juvenile defendants whose cases were disposed of in all Queensland courts in 2014-15, being down from the previous year's total of 7,134 to 6,515.

Given that the amendments were made by the former LNP government in 2014, it is reasonable to believe and conclude that this is the reason for the improved results in the 2014-15 annual report. In reading Michael Shanahan's annual report, I note that he states that 10 per cent of juvenile offenders were responsible for 35 per cent of all proven offences. This particular group of repeat offenders must be given particular attention if they are to be rehabilitated as juveniles and not continue to live a life of crime throughout their adult years.

Unfortunately, all that the Labor Party wants to do in Queensland is return to its failed policies of youth justice conferences, which did not work in the past. There is absolutely no evidence that they will work again in the future. There has been no proper review of the 2014 amendments. Given that that has not taken place, it begs the question why there is a need to go back to the failed policies of the past. The future of youth justice is far too important to make amendments for the sake of perceived political gain. The Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 was passed by the Queensland parliament on 18 March 2014 and here we are, some two years later—and before any of those amendments have been given a comprehensive chance to succeed. Instead, the Palaszczuk Labor government is opting to return to the old unsuccessful ways.

What can be more important than breaking the cycle of youth crime in Queensland and improving overall community safety? That was certainly a paramount consideration when the former LNP government introduced its evidence based amendments in 2014. Reforms in youth justice need to ensure that we create safer communities and give our young people the best chance in life. We should all want to hold our young people accountable for their actions whilst giving them and their families the opportunity to turn their lives around and not to descend into a life of crime as adults.

It is certainly a proven fact that there are groups of young offenders who exhibit patterns of repeat offending with interventions such as detention being ineffective at reducing recidivism. There is a real need to provide these young people with alternative programs. Considering all of these aspects, that was the reason the 2014 boot camp orders were added to the range of sentencing options. To remove this option without the introduction of an enhanced alternative and without an identifiable review for a replacement says to me that the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 is all about politics and is little about improvements to the youth justice system.

Youth crime issues in Townsville and North Queensland have been left unaddressed by the Labor government. Youth from North Queensland, who were part of the boot camp trial, would have been offered other supported programs to help them continue with positive behaviours and once again be part of their community and reduce the risk of future offending. The community of Townsville fought hard for reforms to be put in place, because the residents were in full support of something that needed to be done to alleviate the level of crime in their city. There are absolutely no proposals in these bills that will address that situation or the disproportionate overrepresentation of Indigenous juvenile offenders within our justice system. In fact, there is absolutely no mention of this issue to be found in the introductory speeches by the minister.

Juvenile crime is not the only symptom that suggests that, for some of Queensland's youth, something has fundamentally gone wrong. Another symptom is youth suicide. Unfortunately, high rates of youth unemployment and experimentation with illicit drugs leading to substance dependency, adverse health problems and crime can dominate the lives of many in our state. Eating disorders, volatile substance use and the abuse of prescription and synthetic drugs all feature prominently at increasingly younger ages in some communities. Other symptoms include rising rates of all forms of bullying and physical violence towards peers; the rejection of traditional sources of authority; the refusal to take personal responsibility; the denial of social obligations; increased hostility towards learning; school truancy and vandalism; and deficiencies in reasoning, empathy, compassion and understanding, as well as lower levels of literacy with poor educational outcomes. The signposts are many, all pointing towards a common denominator: they are all illustrative of antisocial behaviour and personally self-destructive impulses.

However, there is much that can be done, particularly with respect to our education system. I know the member for Townsville may be interested in some of these comments, given his role in the education system. Our school and educational system must be focused on unlimited achievement, and introducing a practical learning-how-to-learn methodology based on knowledge and epistemology of the highest order dating back to Socrates and Aristotle should be a priority. As a consequence, intellectual capital will be fostered, cherished and expanded for the benefit of business, industry and all communities. That approach contrasts sharply with the prevailing practice of accepting learning disability as a legitimate outcome of school education in need of ever-increasing quantities of funding and staffing, with remedial and compensatory measures legitimised by new benchmarks of reduced average performance.

I conclude by stating that all governments face challenges posed by explicit and implicit tensions in trying to satisfy competing interests. Good governments seek to balance their budgets. Smart governments try to defuse or reduce likely tensions and issues before they emerge. Wise governments will make every dollar spent, every initiative commenced, or piece of legislation passed, produce a multiple return and positive effect in the present and into the future. It is for those reasons that I cannot support the objectives and reasoning of both the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

We know that Labor is soft on crime. We are seeing evidence that Labor wants to empower criminal gangs. Certainly, Labor has been empowering illegality in many of our unions and union corruption. We have seen what has happened with the royal commission, chaired by Dyson Heydon. What about the Australian Building and Construction Commission? The member for Stafford, along with his state and federal colleagues, should be getting behind the ABCC and supporting it in cleaning up all of the corruption and illegality that is going on in the unions—the Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation, the ETU, the CFMEU.

Presumably, all the great work that the LNP did with respect to youth justice is the reason that some members of the Labor Party want to undo that great work and expand criminal gangs and foster union criminality. It is just a shame that they are fostering all of the union criminality, which seems to be going on here in Queensland—

**A government member:** You're the biggest union of all.

**Dr ROWAN:** I take that interjection from the honourable member opposite. In fact, that is not the case. Having been a member of a professional association and having headed a professional association, I inform the member opposite that there is a difference between a professional association and the corruption that exists in our trade unions.

*(Time expired)*