




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (10.51 pm): I rise to speak against the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. As members of parliament we have a fundamental obligation to reflect the views, the issues and the concerns of Queenslanders. For that reason I have to oppose this legislation tonight.

This legislation is seeking to water down the laws that we currently have in place regarding juvenile offences. I will speak some more on that shortly. There is no quick fix for juvenile crime. It is a complex issue. It is an evolving issue. I will talk about Townsville tonight. The residents of Townsville have had enough. They are sick and tired of these juvenile offenders breaking into their homes, stealing their property, damaging their property and stealing their cars. These are the cars that they use to take their kids to school, to do the shopping, to go to work. These are the cars that they then find wrecked and burnt out with no avenue for restitution or compensation.

I too attended the recent crime forum in Townsville and I have a different take on that to that of the Attorney-General. The message I received at that crime forum is exactly what I have said. That is that people are sick and tired of these kids breaking the law and committing offences and not receiving adequate punishment.

As a police officer for 25 years, the last eight as the officer in charge of the Townsville police division, as a former mentor at the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre and as a former member of the northern parole board I think I am well qualified to stand in this place tonight and talk about youth justice. I want to share with members a story about one of the young inmates at Cleveland. We will call him Darcy for the sake of anonymity. During the time that I was Darcy's mentor at Cleveland he came in and out of that place three times. On two of those occasions within a week of being released he was homeless. On one of those occasions he was almost bashed to death.

That kid over that period of time forged a bond with me to the extent that I received a phone call from him last night in this place. I could not believe it. I said to him, 'Where have you been.' He said, 'I just got out of prison.' He had just finished a three-year term of imprisonment in an adult prison. The message here in terms of a lot of these juveniles is that if they are not rehabilitated and they are not supported adequately they will progress to a life of crime. In this case, that is exactly what has happened.

On the third occasion this kid was released from Cleveland we sent him out to Mount Isa and Colin Saltmere from Myuma. Some members may know Colin Saltmere. In effect, Colin was running a boot camp. This kid was operating machinery. This kid was learning how to get a job. I will never forget when he came back to Townsville in his new clothes and boots how proud he was that he had actually

got himself organised and he was starting to get on the road to finding employment and actually doing something with his life. Unfortunately, whilst he was back in Townsville he got mixed up with his old mates and went off the rails again.

I highlight to the Attorney-General tonight that there are three things that I think we need to take into consideration. Firstly, we need to target these kids when they are young. We need to target those kids who are absent from school. How do I know that? I know that because I ran the remote schools strategy on Palm Island. We raised school attendance rates over there from below 50 per cent to 85 per cent and the crime rate went down. When kids are going to school they are not out there committing crimes. The kids who are regularly absent from school are the ones who need to be targeted. They are the ones we need to be pouring the resources into. If we capture them at that age then we are well and truly on the road to getting them on the straight and narrow.

Secondly, we need to do a lot more work at the point of release. A lot of these juvenile offenders—and I saw this time and time again at Cleveland—go into places like Cleveland, do all these programs, undertake training, counselling and rehabilitation, say all the right things about wanting to get out and get a job and do something with their life and they get out and the support falls away. They go back into home environments where there is domestic violence, where they are being sexually abused and assaulted and where there are drugs.

There needs to be a lot more work and a lot more resources at the point of release. That may very well mean that for some of these kids they have to go—and I hate using this term—to a halfway house, to a transitional accommodation facility where they are supported, where they have to be there at night time, where they can be driven to work, college, TAFE or whatever the case may be each day until they can get themselves organised to be able to take on that role themselves.

Thirdly, a lot of the programs that currently exist need to be reviewed and overhauled. There are certainly a lot of operators out there at the moment being paid a lot of money for very little result. They will tell people how good they are. They will tell people about the results that they are magically getting looking after these kids. At the end of the day, we start to question the results. I saw that firsthand on Palm Island as well.

I have a pretty simple philosophy with these kids. I certainly did not pull any punches. If they commit the crime they do the time. I think that is a reasonable expectation of most people in our community. That goes for removing breach of bail as an offence for children. If someone goes out and commits a crime then I think Queenslanders should be able to go to bed at time in comfort knowing that that kid is not back out on the street committing further offences.

I recently had two parents come in and see me in my electorate office in the Burdekin. They wanted to give me their 13-year-old son because he was out of control. That kid was out every night committing break and enters and damaging property. He was out of control. He was on bail. They came into my office and said, 'We cannot control this kid anymore; he is yours.' It was like what one would do with a stray puppy. They said, 'He is yours, Dale, take him home.'

That reflects the frustration out there in the community and the frustration for a lot of our parents of these juvenile offenders about what to do with their kids and the need to do a lot more work with them when they actually go to jail. When I was talking to Darcy last night, I actually asked him, 'What could we have done differently? What could we have done to stop you going into that adult prison?' He said to me, 'I almost had my life together. When I went out to Myuma, I was driving excavators, front-end loaders and dozers and I loved it. That's what I wanted to do but I needed someone to tell me that I had to stay there. If I had stayed there long enough, I would have got my act together and I would have ended up at Century Mine driving machinery.' It does not take much but you need to make that effort and that commitment.

Conferencing with juveniles for me has its ups and downs, its hits and misses, if you like. For a lot of these kids particularly in this day and age, they are hardened criminals at age 13 or 12, whether you like to admit that or not. I have seen some of these kids and I have seen some of their criminal histories. I will never forget a juvenile who came into the police station when I was in Townsville with a criminal history running to something like 27 pages. I am sure the Attorney-General has seen those types of criminal histories—where there were property offences and break and enter offences numbering in the hundreds. These kids know the legal system. This kid that I was mentoring at Cleveland was telling me the law. He knew what to say and he knew how to manipulate it. We should not stop and pretend for one minute that these kids are angels. We need to be serious about this. We need to take a holistic view of it. We certainly need to look at the bigger picture in terms of where we go to from here in managing this issue in our community.