




Speech By
Hon. Leeanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Record of Proceedings, 3 November 2016

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

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Innovation, Science and the Digital Economy and Minister for Small Business) (8.36 pm): I rise to support the youth justice and other legislation amendment bill 2016. Children have absolutely no place in an adult prison, yet to Queensland's shame the treatment of 17-year-olds in the adult criminal justice system has been an issue in our state for more than two decades. Queensland is not only out of step with all other Australian jurisdictions when it comes to this question but it is also inconsistent, as we have heard several times tonight, with the internationally recognised United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The placement of 17-year-olds in adult prisons is even more inconsistent with every other definition that we have for an adult in Queensland for other purposes. It is time we did something about it, and I am proud to be part of a Labor government that is once again taking the lead to tackle an injustice. I congratulate the Attorney-General for taking such a strong stance to address this issue.

The role of the state when it comes to youth in detention should be to provide young people with targeted programs to give them the greatest opportunity to rehabilitate themselves, find that second chance and make the most of the lives they have in front of them. Placing young people in an adult prison clearly denies them access to the critical targeted services that help do just that, making rehabilitation and change that much more difficult.

I am on the public record with regard to my concern about the continual over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system, in particular the youth justice system. No matter how you look at it, the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the justice system is unacceptable. Despite representing just eight per cent of children aged 10 to 17 in Queensland, young Indigenous people currently comprise two-thirds of all young people in detention. Unarguably this represents an incredibly complex issue with many facets, but it is also a reflection of decades of inaction or misdirected action from governments at all levels and of different persuasions. Everyone has a right to basic human dignity regardless of their circumstances, and I am committed to working with my parliamentary colleagues to find solutions to this complex moral issue.

Our government has already restored a number of measures to help reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system, not least of which is the re-establishment of the Murri Court. We know that the Murri Court is an important intervention tool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The Murri Court was thoughtlessly discarded by the LNP, and we are proud that we have reinstated it. Keeping 17-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth out of adult prisons is a big step in helping to deliver improved outcomes once they are released from detention. That is why this bill is so important for all communities right around the state.

The reforms in this bill are part of the government's broad reform agenda in youth justice and represent significant and progressive reform for how 17-year-olds are treated in the justice system. The Attorney-General has recently ordered an independent review of Queensland youth detention centres. Once again I acknowledge the commitment she has to young people in our state.

The ongoing reform agenda is very clear in its objectives. It is about reducing offending and reoffending and reducing the number of young people on remand. It is also about increasing the number of children and young people being successfully supported in the community and increasing community safety. This is a great step forward for Queensland, and only the Palaszczuk government has committed to working on this long overdue reform.

Children and young people who commit offences will still be held accountable for their offending. Of course, courts will continue to appraise appropriate outcomes for offending. The difference, however, is that this government is committed to reducing the number of children and young people—and of course that means reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people—who find themselves in the youth justice system and providing the support they need to turn their lives around and positively contribute to their communities. I commend the bill to the House.