




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

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

 **Mr RYAN** (Morayfield—ALP) (5.13 pm): I start by expressing my complete confidence in this outstanding Attorney-General and the reforms that she has ushered in under her stewardship in this very important portfolio. I must say that she is a million times better than her predecessor and I am happy to stand by this Attorney-General every time.

I rise to make a contribution to the Youth Justice and Other Legislation (Inclusion of 17-year-old Persons) Amendment Bill 2016. I commend the government members of the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee for their contribution to the consideration of this bill and their contribution to the committee report. I have read the report and I am very impressed with the government members' contribution.

This is a matter which has been before the Queensland parliament and before the people of Queensland for a long time. It has been something that I have been very interested in and very passionate about. I am very pleased that we will be ending, with the support of this House, an injustice in respect of how we have treated 17-year-olds in Queensland within the context of the criminal justice system.

As we know, in Queensland currently the law defines adulthood as commencing at the age of 18, except in the criminal justice system. By treating 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system we are not just inconsistent within our own state and with the rest of Australia but also actually in breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This bill before the House will correct that situation.

I have an outstanding youth justice service located within the Morayfield electorate.

Mrs D'Ath: Hear, hear!

Mr RYAN: The Attorney-General has been there and has met with the hardworking youth justice staff. The Caboolture Youth Justice Centre, which is on Walkers Road at Morayfield, has been there for a number of years and has been working very hard with our local young people to ensure that they receive the support that they need to be positive contributors in our community, to make sure that where young people find themselves on the wrong side of the law they receive the support that they need not only to address those troubles that they may have experienced but also to then go on and become positive contributors.

One of the services that is supported through the Caboolture Youth Justice Centre is the YJET program. Again, the Attorney-General is very well aware of the YJET program. The YJET program has been running for a number of years from that youth justice service. One of our community organised partners, Intercept, has been very involved in ensuring that we provide opportunities for those young children who are at risk of spending the rest of their lives engaged in the criminal justice system. Surely

no-one in this House supports the outcome that young people could spend the rest of their lives engaged in the criminal justice system. Whatever we can do to ensure that those young people at risk get the support that they need to lead productive lives and lives that are free from being engaged in the criminal justice system is, I think, a paramount thing that we need to consider.

The YJET program provides opportunities for those young people who might not be engaged in school and who might be at risk of engaging in the criminal justice system. They provide those young people not only with educational support but also with the additional emotional and community support that they need to lead productive lives. A few years ago at one of the YJET graduations I heard a story from one of the parents about what the YJET program had meant to them and their young person. The program meant that their young person not only did not end up in jail but went on to continue engaging in family life, eventually going back to school and then getting a job. I think that that is testimony to the hard work of those people who are involved in the YJET program.

Another instance is when I ran into one of the mums of a graduate from the YJET program. Let us just call this young person Dylan. This mother said to me that she was pleased to see me at her son's graduation a few years ago. I said, 'What school did your son go to?' She said that he went to the YJET program at the Caboolture Youth Justice Centre. I try to never miss a YJET graduation. I asked what Dylan was up to. This mother said, 'Dylan has gone on to get an apprenticeship as a mechanic and he is earning more money now as an apprentice mechanic'—and we all know that apprentices do not earn that much money—'than our family has ever seen.' This is what gets me: Dylan's mother then said to me, 'We're just so proud of him.' That is the benefit of intervening early when we talk about youth justice. This is the benefit of making sure that we correct the injustice of 17-year-olds being considered to be part of the adult criminal justice system. This bill, of course, will correct that injustice.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work of all the people at the Caboolture Youth Justice Centre. They do outstanding work and they have been leaders in their field for many years. I know that they have often won awards for the work they have done engaging young people in the community. Just a few years ago, before the youth justice changes of the Newman government, they achieved some outstanding results when it came to measuring recidivism in the Caboolture area, with the number of young people reoffending being some of the lowest numbers. That is because they adopt an approach of working with young people to ensure that they are given not only the incentives but also the support to lead productive lives and to contribute to our economy in ways that are of benefit to our community.

I am very pleased to see that we have taken the very courageous step to correct this injustice and ensure that the law in Queensland is not only consistent with the laws of Australia but also consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has taken a long time for us to get to this point. I must credit not only the Attorney-General but also the Premier for their outstanding leadership on this issue and for ensuring that Queensland is no longer inflicting this injustice on young people in our community. I hope that all members of the House will support this very courageous correction to the law in Queensland.