




Speech By  
**Hon. Shannon Fentiman**

**MEMBER FOR WATERFORD**

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Record of Proceedings, 17 June 2016

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

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (12.44 am): As the Minister for Youth, I am proud to participate in this debate to support the important reforms in the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The Palaszczuk government values young people and recognises the unique contributions they make to our community, our economy and our state. This represents a refreshing change for young people in Queensland: a government that respects and listens to them. What they got from the previous government were ineffective and costly boot camps, draconian name-and-shame laws and a youth strategy that had absolutely no input from young people themselves. I am particularly pleased to see that initiatives that put already vulnerable children at additional risk are now being reversed.

Dealing with young people who commit a crime is a particularly sensitive policy area and must be approached with an abundance of caution with programs developed on sound evidence. Yes, young people absolutely must be held accountable. There is no doubt that there are some very serious crimes committed by very young people and they should be dealt with accordingly. However, many can turn their lives around if they are provided with support and early intervention. With programs achieving real outcomes, rather than blunt punishment tools, we can equip these young people, many of whom have never had an adult in their life who was willing or able to help them, with the skills they need to be positive contributors to our society.

The previous government's penalise, punish and imprison approach to young people went against every principle relating to the rehabilitation and protection of children. They made Queensland the only state not to follow the principle that a custodial sentence should be the last resort option. We are here to right that wrong. They went further, in fact, and allowed the publication of identifying information regarding children who are repeat offenders, ensuring children are labelled for life and are severely inhibited from turning their lives around. We are righting that wrong also tonight. The Palaszczuk government thinks we cannot ignore the internationally accepted principles such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration.

As part of my own efforts to strengthen connections with youth services and supporting vulnerable young people in our community, late last year I visited the Moreton Bay youth service Collaborative Action Group with the member for Murrumba. At that visit I met with Kyle, a young man who had been incarcerated since he was 17. He told me how helpful it was to have a range of services working together to support him when he was released, rehouse him, liaise with Child Safety Services

but also provide him with a really strong sense of community. Kyle was very keen to see reform in the youth justice sector, telling me that after coming out of prison he also found it incredibly difficult to find employment. I now understand that, through the help of youth services funded by our government, he is training to be a youth worker.

I have been so inspired to meet young people right across Queensland who have done it really, really tough who have not only turned their own lives around but have gone back to help other young people who have had similar experiences. We are a government who stands with vulnerable young people.

It is so important that government work with services to support young people and not stand in their way or put further barriers in place. These reforms have the support of some very significant stakeholders in the areas of children's law and child protection from Protect All Children Today, the Anti-Discrimination Commission, the Queensland Law Society and the Queensland Family and Child Commission. They are at one in recognising the importance of the changes in this bill. I encourage those opposite to learn from their past mistakes and join stakeholders and support these reforms. I commend the bill to the House.