




Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

Record of Proceedings, 17 June 2016

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

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (11.30 pm): I rise to speak on the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. I am speaking as a former member of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee and as someone who has had experience in attempting to deal with youth offenders through the youth justice conferencing system. Any observant member of the community knows only too well that there are fundamental and ongoing youth justice issues in Queensland. In the 2014-15 annual report of the Childrens Court, President Michael Shanahan noted—

In 2014-15, ten percent of juvenile offenders were responsible for 45% of all proven offences.

I repeat—

In 2014-15, ten percent of juvenile offenders were responsible for 45% of all proven offences.

He also said—

... there are a number of persistent offenders who commit multiple offences. It is this identifiable group to which attention must be given in attempts to rehabilitate if a significant decrease in offending by them as juveniles and, later, as adults is to be achieved.

I have had personal experience dealing with the impacts on a community of youth offenders. As any parent knows, managing young adults or teenagers can sometimes be a frustrating experience. Managing youth offenders can be even worse, as we have to let them know the seriousness of their offence and to redirect them into acceptable behaviours so they do not reoffend. Unfortunately, there are some youths who, despite our best efforts, keep offending again and again.

The Labor Party's solution to the problem of youth offenders is to wind back any program implemented by the previous government. It really has no solution other than that it cannot be anything the previous LNP government implemented. It provides no measures which address the specific issue of recidivist youth offenders. It does not seek evidence on whether previous policies worked. It ignores evidence from the Childrens Court, which states—

The trend line in relation to the ten year comparison of the number of juvenile defendants ... shows ... in 2014-15 ... there was a 8.7% cent decrease from the previous year. The trend line in relation to the ten year comparison of the number of charges against juvenile defendants ... [shows] ... in 2014-15 there was a 4.9% cent decrease from the previous year.

This shows that the former LNP government's measures should be given a chance to work. It shows that there should be no changes without the completion of a proper outcomes based review into the youth boot camp initiative. It ignores advice from KPMG to keep the Gold Coast early intervention youth boot camp open, as it was showing positive signs of successfully steering youth away from the youth justice system. It provides no measures to help reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous juvenile offenders in youth detention centres, despite statistics showing that 'young Indigenous people accounted for 43 per cent of all young people ... and ... 64 per cent of the average daily number of juveniles in detention were Indigenous'.

This bill is yet another one in a long list of those put forward to this parliament based on the simple narrow-minded approach of winding back the clock. As a result, the government is winding back to a system that was clearly broken and not working. As I said earlier, I have had experience with dealing with youth offenders. In my previous role as a local government councillor I was a community representative on a youth justice conference organised by the local police. It was essentially a mediation or conferencing system where the offending youths were brought together with their parents or guardians, the police and community representatives and forced to face the full ramifications of their offence, which often involved gratuitous vandalism. Together with the Kilkivan branch manager of the Gympie Regional Council offices, I had firsthand experience of the difficult task of dealing with youth offenders. This is because in many instances offences have financial consequences for the local community to repair or re-establish the damaged property. There are also emotional costs for many hardworking community members and volunteers who are proud of their local area and feel violated by the wilful damage to community property.

I particularly recall a young offender who sat there insolently thumbing his nose at the community, the police, the legal system and the government. These offenders believed they were untouchable, and in many cases they knew they were untouchable. I am sorry to say, but the young gentleman I just referred to kept reoffending and is now incarcerated for repeat offences into his adult life. Repeat offenders know that the system has no teeth. It is a toothless tiger.

The situation before us was best summarised in evidence given by a Townsville resident, who said—

On 1 December 2015 the Palaszczuk government ... announcing youth justice reforms. This government deemed these reforms did not work. How can the current government say something does not work if it has not been utilised properly? The government have been in power for 12 months now and during that time they have repeatedly said they would get tough on crime. In those 12 months they have not introduced any new policies or reforms in regard to combating juvenile crime.

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr PERRETT: I am quoting word for word. It continues—

Instead, they have been busy trying to quash the previous government's reforms which were put in place by the LNP government because the public had had enough. The public were sick of hearing about crimes happening and having little to no feedback if the offenders were caught. We have yet to see the courts use these reforms to their full and proper potential so that they are actually given a chance to work.

Townsville fought hard for these reforms ... because residents felt that something needed to be done ... People were frustrated by the lack of action against juveniles repeatedly committing crimes and hearing about them getting off with a slap on the wrist. Juveniles were using the court system like a revolving door.

As I said earlier, the only plan the government seems to have for youth justice in Queensland is to undo policies initiated by the previous government. The LNP's 2014 youth justice amendments should be given a chance to work until a proper review is undertaken.