




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOMERA

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**CORRECTIVE SERVICES (PAROLE BOARD) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (3.03 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the debate on the Corrective Services (Parole Board) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2017 and report No. 53 of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee. The committee constantly gets criticism through written submissions and also verbally about there being not enough time to consider bills. We understand that there is urgency in considering some bills, but this bill was introduced to the House on 16 February and the committee had to report on it by 28 April. The committee members expect submitters to the committee on bills to provide them with thoughtful and in-depth comments in relation to these very complex issues. I ask the House to seriously give consideration to ensuring that the committee members have much more time up their sleeves to be able to give those in the community a genuine opportunity to respond to the materials that are sent out to them and to properly put something together as a comment on the bills so that we can properly flesh them out. I am talking about organisations that send out to many other people material or requests for comment. Those people then have to give responses to those organisations and then the organisations have to collate the information they have received. Committees need to spend more time considering bills. I think it is important that committees are given every opportunity to be able to properly report on them to the House.

In my experience in looking at various aspects of parole and recidivism rates, one criticism that comes to mind is that relating to court ordered parole, in particular court ordered parole for young people. I am told by people in the corrective services system that court ordered parole tends to take away any incentive for young people in particular to engage in any programs that might give them an opportunity to have a better chance once they are released. I am talking about not only juvenile defendants but also people in that 17 and 18-to-25 age group. If during the court process they are given an actual release date—for example, their sentence might be for 12 months and they are told that they will be released much earlier; four months or whatever it might be—the incentive is taken away from that young person to do anything that is worthwhile. The feedback that I get from the corrective services area is that, with young people, that happens quite often.

During the committee examination and hearings the committee heard from more than one submitter, and certainly more than one witness, of the desire to have a broad range of people on the Parole Board. Yes, experience relating to victims of crime is important, but we also need people with experience relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and experience relating to regional communities. That feedback came through loud and clear.

I am pleased that an amendment to clause 12 of the bill has been brought to our attention. That amendment amends new section 234, titled 'Meetings about particular matters relating to parole orders', to extend the definition of 'prescribed prisoner' to include a prisoner who is imprisoned for an offence of choking, suffocation or strangulation in a domestic setting under section 315A of the Criminal Code.

To come back to my first point of giving organisations and individuals time to give serious consideration to the bills that we are putting out for comment, it is important to note that the impetus for that amendment was the submission by the Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence Inc to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee during its consideration of the bill. It is a real change that will occur in this bill as a direct result of input from those submitters to the committee process.

There were interesting comments from Eoin Mac Giolla Ri. He is on the Criminal Law Committee of the Bar Association of Queensland. He talked about there not being enough programs in place. That dovetails into what I was talking about earlier in relation to court ordered parole. At the end of the day it is a proven fact that if we are able to engage young people in our corrective services system in programs it reduces the likelihood of recidivism. I often think of the issues that cause people to end up back in our system from the perspective of AEIOU. The A relates to appropriate accommodation, not accommodation such as couch surfing. The E is for education. If we are able to engage with young people in the prison system and give them a better opportunity through education then that reduces the likelihood of them becoming recidivist offenders. The I is for integration. Some people talk about reintegration, but it is really integration. Often some of these young people have never properly been integrated into society because of their background and what has happened in their life. Because of their living circumstances they have never been taught to properly integrate into our society. The O is for occupation. If we put that proper education and training in place then we will see a better opportunity for them to be employed when they leave our prison system. The last one is U for understanding. We need to understand where they have come from in their life. The other side of it is that they need to understand what the expectations of society are of them, which comes back to integration.

Eoin Mac Giolla Ri talked about prison being an admission of failure of a society and isn't that so true? If we do not put disengaged young people into some sort of an education program when they are young they will find themselves with little to do, they will get into trouble and from there they will end up in our legal system and, all too often, in our prison system. As a government we need to look at such things as appropriate education programs for people who do not fit into mainstream schools. We fortunately have a number of those types of facilities in my electorate on the Gold Coast. I am very pleased that we have the Eagleby Learning Centre and other centres that are working as an alternative education program for young people and hopefully we can stem the flow of young people ending up in our prison system at a later time.

As was talked about by Eoin Mac Giolla Ri, a prison population is split into three parts. A third of them are mad—and we are talking about mental health issues; a third of them are sad—whatever has happened to them in their life has caused them to be depressed which leads them into drug taking, et cetera, and then into our legal system and ultimately into the jail system; and the reality is that probably around about a third of our prison population are bad—those who really need to be incarcerated and punished in some way. As a society we have to do a lot more in areas other than our corrective services area. It is not just about catching them and putting them into jail, it is all of those other areas that we need to work on to ensure that we do not just keep throwing them in the river upstream and then having to fish them out downstream having put them through the prison system.

The committee worked well on this bill. A good range of people gave us witness statements telling us about their particular circumstances and experiences and freely giving of their knowledge. It was a worthwhile process, albeit not long enough in the scheme of things. I would like to thank all of the committee members and, of course, our secretariat who did a wonderful job on this and a number of other reports that had very short timelines.

On page 8 and 9 of our report we talked about the department's response to some submitters. The committee commented—

The committee notes submitters' suggestions that the PBQ should be comprised of people from diverse backgrounds, including those from regional and remote communities and those with disability.

I did not mention people with a disability. I think we need to give consideration to that. Those with disability includes those who are not necessarily physically disabled, they may also have mental health issues.

The committee considers that diversity of representation on the PBQ could enhance decision-making and ensure it best represents the interests of the prison population and broader community.

That was a whole-of-committee comment. I put it to the minister that he should give consideration to ensuring that diversity does, in fact, flow through.