




Speech By
Brent Mickelberg

MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2019

YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (12.18 pm): I rise to speak to the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. I do so as the comrades from the CFMMEU and ETU protest outside in judgement of this government. This bill is the Palaszczuk Labor government's response to their own kneejerk, ill-conceived decisions which have resulted in a youth crime crisis across the state. The blame for the youth crime crisis falls squarely at the feet of the Palaszczuk Labor government. As Ian Leavers, the president of the Queensland Police Union, recently wrote—

As a result of the Youth Justice Minister's inability to do her job, we now have more juveniles than adults in the Brisbane watch house.

We have heard members of the government come in here and try to suggest that this is a problem of the LNP's making, which frankly is nothing short of laughable. Labor have been in government for 25 of the last 30 years. Past premiers Bligh and Beattie identified this issue two decades ago. This is a problem of the Labor Party's making and it is time that they take responsibility for fixing it.

Clearly, the issue of youth justice is a complex one and differing views exist as to the appropriate responses to address community concerns. No-one wants to see children detained in adult watch houses for extended periods of time. However, the response to this problem should not be a weakening of bail provisions for young offenders. Any response needs to be viewed through the lens of ensuring community safety first and foremost while ensuring that young offenders are appropriately detained when necessary.

As I said, let us be clear. The genesis of this problem lies in Labor's rushed decision to remove 17-year-olds from adult detention centres. Rather than plan appropriately, this government chose to react to adverse media and make decisions on the fly without consideration of the consequences. Unfortunately, the consequences of Labor's rushed decision have been children as young as 10 being held in watch houses for weeks on end and 10-year-old children waiting for overcrowded youth detention centres to have space available. We have heard evidence of a child housed in an adult watch house for 45 days and of terrible situations, including claims of a young girl being placed in the same cell as two alleged paedophiles, along with numerous suicide attempts. That is why the LNP is moving amendments—

Ms FARMER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I ask you to caution any members about making misleading statements in parliament. I believe the member may have been in the House yesterday when the—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): That is not a point of order.

Ms FARMER: It is about misleading statements. I ask you to caution the member—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is an opinion. I would encourage the minister to not raise frivolous points of order but actually consider the standing orders.

Mr MICKELBERG: That is why the LNP is moving amendments to restrict the length of time children can be held in watch houses to 72 hours. Labor like to talk a big game about rights, but actions speak louder than words. Keeping children in adult watch houses shows a blatant disregard for children's rights. Labor have known about this problem for years but have chosen to ignore it. It is only when their self-interest is endangered by media reporting that we see this bill rushed into parliament.

Community safety should come first. Communities across Queensland are sick and tired of the same youth offenders holding them to ransom. The issues in places like Townsville and Cairns are well known but this is an issue in all communities. In my own community, locals tell me they are sick and tired of youth offenders disregarding the expectations and laws that the rest of us adhere to. They are sick and tired of assaults on public transport and in parks. They are sick and tired of their cars being stolen and vandalised. And they are sick and tired of their homes being burgled.

My local police tell me they are sick and tired of futile late-night visits to frantic families who are unable to control their teenage children. They are sick and tired of arresting the same youth offenders time and time again. And they are sick and tired of youth offenders breaching their bail conditions without consequence.

The views of my community and of my local police are supported by the statistics, which show a clear increase in offending. Between 2017 and 2018 we saw a 13.7 per cent increase in offending in places like Buderim and Mountain Creek and a 17.9 per cent increase in offending in Sippy Downs. Perhaps what is most concerning is that Sippy Downs is facing a more than 57 per cent increase in offending in the first six months of this calendar year.

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr MICKELBERG: In Sippy Downs we have seen a 56 per cent increase in unlawful entry between 2017 and 2018. We know that many of these offences are the result of the same individuals who offend time and time again. In fact, 10 per cent of youth offenders are responsible for 44 per cent of all proven offences. In many cases, police know who the perpetrators are, they have arrested them in the past, and more often than not they are released back out on bail. That is why it is so concerning to see Labor weakening bail laws. Labor's solution to this problem will result in more youth offenders back on the street, putting the community at risk. Those who do the wrong thing should face the consequences of their actions.

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr MICKELBERG: Regardless of age, bail should be a privilege, not a right. If an individual who is already out on bail cannot adhere to their bail conditions, they should no longer be afforded that privilege. The LNP's proposal to restore the offence of breach of bail will address this issue and is reflective of community expectation.

There are, however, some aspects of this bill which make sense. The LNP supports the provisions to improve information sharing across government departments and the authorisation for the use of body worn cameras by officers. What is missing though is a whole-of-government solution that goes to the core of addressing this issue. Across Queensland, school principals, the police and child safety are picking up the pieces, trying to make the best out of a failing system. We need to move away from the current silo departmental approach to a system where the root cause of these problems is addressed and where community safety is protected at all times.

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Thuringowa will cease interjecting. You have constantly been interjecting and I will soon have to start warning.

Mr MICKELBERG: There have been countless reviews into the issue of youth justice, including the recent review completed by Bob Atkinson. Time and again, the government choose to cherry-pick the recommendations of such reviews. Why, for example, have the government disregarded Bob Atkinson's recommendation for youth offenders to wear tracking devices when out on bail? A balance needs to be struck between holding offenders in appropriate facilities and keeping repeat offenders off the streets. Our communities deserve to be safe. The notion that the government would weaken provisions to detain serious youth offenders just to resolve a problem of their own making is not in line with community expectations. I call on the Labor government to develop a solution that addresses the root cause of Queensland's youth crime epidemic and to support the LNP's amendments restoring breach of bail as an offence and restricting the length of time children can be held in a watch house to 72 hours.