




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (12.12 pm): The Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is an important piece of legislation which complements our significant investment in initiatives that are designed to reduce demand pressures within the Youth Justice system. I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to ending unnecessary detention for children and young people and to tackle the issue of juvenile crime.

This legislation continues the work of delivering on the Youth Justice Strategy Action Plan 2019-20 titled Working Together Changing the Story. I do want to commend Minister Di Farmer on the Youth Justice Strategy. Since it was launched in December 2018, this government has provided further reforms, including: an investment of \$332.5 million to tackle youth crime; a new Department of Youth Justice, formed in May 2019; new programs implemented to reduce the high number of children remanded in custody; and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children currently held in police watch houses. This amendment bill is the next step in implementing these reforms. Once passed, this bill will remove legislative barriers to children being granted bail.

There are no easy solutions to tackling youth justice issues. When the LNP was last in government they decided it was best to just lock up all young offenders. We have just heard the contribution from the member for Burdekin, which reinforces that. It may have been led by Campbell Newman, but the member for Kawana was the one who signed the legislative changes. In fact, he was determined to make life as difficult for young people as possible. He said—

... we had a clear strategy. The first phase was to make the fun stop in detention centres by getting rid of the bucking bulls, the jumping castles and the Xboxes, which we did.

Talk about trivialising a serious social issue for political gain! But there was more. The member for Kawana opened Childrens Court hearings to the public and permitted the names of these children to be made public. He removed the sentencing principle of detention and imprisonment as a last resort from the Youth Justice Act 1992 and common law. He mandated that 17-year-old offenders with six or more months remaining on their sentence be transferred to adult correctional facilities. The changes implemented under the previous LNP government contravened the human rights of these young people.

They tried to create a police state under the guise of a so-called youth crime wave because they claimed that children were getting away with crime too lightly. They pandered to the biases—and they still do—of their electorates and made politically expedient decisions that did nothing to address the issues, so you can imagine my shock when I saw the Leader of the Opposition declare on Twitter recently that the Premier needs to remove children from adult detention immediately. That is what we get from the LNP: convenient virtue signalling that belies their history and true intentions in this space.

The Palaszczuk government is not soft on crime. Through this action plan the Department of Youth Justice and its partner agencies will hold children and young people accountable for their criminal behaviour. These agencies will also address the causes of crime and engage with families and communities to develop positive, sustainable and culturally appropriate solutions. A key focus of their

work will be to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the youth justice system. This action plan includes a range of actions that will improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In this nation young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 54 per cent of all those in detention, yet they account for three per cent of the population. Clearly we have a problem.

As a sidenote, I want to applaud the Attorney-General, who overturned another LNP travesty by recently reinstating the Murri Court in Ipswich. I also want to acknowledge the incredible work of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders in my community, who mentor and support those who come into contact with the justice system. Their aim is to stop recidivism. We want to reduce the use of police watch houses to accommodate children on remand. If children do need to be detained, we have a duty to do everything possible to keep them safe and address their needs. In order to maintain public expectations of community safety it is necessary to build contemporary, secure accommodation that is safe and appropriate for serious or repeat offenders.

This action plan recognises that the government alone cannot change the story for young people. It requires a fundamental shift in the way that government, non-government, community organisations and businesses work together to support families, deter young people from committing crime and help them change their own story. It is about restorative justice where we bring together health, education, parents and the community to support children who have complex needs. As the Premier has said, I think that the best thing we can do for our young people is to give them help and purpose. The Skilling Queenslanders for Work program is extremely successful. In my electorate alone youth unemployment has dropped seven per cent since we re-introduced the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program. This is an example of what good policy can do to turn stories around for young people.

I also want to mention Project Booyah. It is an extremely successful program. It is dramatically reducing recidivism. I love working with our local team and hearing their stories and results. They are supporting young vulnerable people. We have the Ipswich Community Young Service and we have regular interagency meetings with the youth workers in our community. They are working every single day to improve the lives of young people in our community. This is an example of how the community can work together to change outcomes for young people.

This bill ensures that conditions imposed as part of bail are better tailored to the circumstances of the individual child. The aim is to reduce the risk of a child breaching bail conditions and being remanded in custody. In addition, there are other amendments that this bill handles, such as: establishing contemporary information-sharing frameworks; clarifying that electronic monitoring devices cannot be used on children; and ensuring that youth detention staff use body worn cameras. This is really important. It gives more protection and provides better safety for young people in detention.

This bill is an important step in continuing the work this government has done so far to reform Queensland's youth justice system, and I am very proud to commend the bill to the House.