




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (6.47 pm): I rise to speak on the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I need to address some of the things that the minister just said about respecting police. I want to assure the thin blue line that I absolutely respect them. It is a shame that their numbers have not been held at the proportion that they should have been held at. It is a shame that their budget has not been—

Mr RYAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member has been speaking for 25 seconds and cannot even keep on the topic. He is into budget matters.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): What is your point of order?

Mr RYAN: Relevance.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Resume your seat. I will take some advice. I call the member for Toowoomba North and ask you to come back to the long title of the bill.

Mr WATTS: I certainly am talking about the long title of the bill, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am also talking about the minister's contribution. If the minister's contribution was not relevant then I would not comment on it, but I feel that it was relevant. It was relevant that our police should be supported.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, we are not here to have a debate. I have asked you to come back to the long title of the bill. Please come back to the long title of the bill. If you dissent from my ruling, there is a mechanism for you to do that.

Mr WATTS: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I will. What I think I need to do here is talk about a government that has good intentions. We all know that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Good intentions need to be followed by good actions, good planning and good preparation so that those intentions can live and breathe and become a reality. I would like to quote Ian Leavers, who is the elected member representing the police force here in Queensland. This is in relation to juveniles in watch houses. He said—

We needed proper planning and modelling before we transferred an entire cohort of offenders into the juvenile system.

The Youth Justice Minister Di Farmer has clearly done nothing. No planning. No modelling. Nothing.

First and foremost, the reason the Police Service have found their watch houses full and the reason the Police Service has found so many juvenile offenders in their care is because, in the opinion of Ian Leavers, who I happen to agree with, the Youth Justice Minister Di Farmer clearly did nothing. 'No planning. No modelling. Nothing.' We can tell that because we are here today talking about a bill that should have been passed before the 17-year-olds were taken out so that pressure was not put on the same system. The things in this bill that might help reduce the number of people who are in the system would have maybe been useful before you overburdened the system and had to lean on the Police Service to deal with. Those officers have come under stress from looking after juvenile offenders in the watch house. They do not have the appropriate training to provide the education, fitness, health, food, nutrition and guidance that those young offenders need when they are in the watch house.

Imagine how stressful that has been for them. The minister comes in here and says that we are the ones stretching the thin blue line, but the thin blue line has been overburdened by managing youth justice issues in the watch house.

If the government were serious about dealing with youth justice issues it would have made a machinery-of-government change before it did this rather than turning our watch houses into detention centres for youth. I do not know about these rumours, but I heard that the intention was that the Brisbane watch house was going to become a youth detention centre. After a while there was a bit of back-peddaling on that. It is very interesting to me that the minister would come in here and suggest that we do not support our Police Service. We support our Police Service 100 per cent. They have been overburdened by this government trying to manage youth justice issues when it is not their domain. It is not their domain to manage youth justice issues. The government should have had a machinery-of-government change to make sure it had the facilities, services, personnel and legislation to ensure that youth justice could be managed. They failed miserably, they were negligent in doing this, and the evidence is before us.

This bill is here being debated today when it should have been debated before they took the 17-year-olds out of the adult system. Let us have a look at what people have had to say about 17-year-olds in the criminal justice system. This has been going on for a long time. We know that back in 2007 the Hon. Warren Pitt said—

For every argument in favour of the move, there is an argument that can be put forward to support the status quo.

For example, it is the case that 17-year-olds would not necessarily be always better off if they were transferred to the juvenile justice system.

That is because the facilities that 17-year-olds were being held in had training, workshops and education. Watch houses do not have workshops for them to go to during the day. Watch houses do not have opportunities for them to do a certificate in something while they are incarcerated. I can only agree with what Mr Pitt had to say. Mr Pitt further said—

Seventeen-year-olds in adult prisons had access to specialist programs tailored to meet a range of needs.

We know from the evidence that the watch houses do not have those specialist programs. The police are not trained to deliver them. They do not have the facilities, the legislative framework or the equipment, and nothing was done to plan it. First and foremost, the failure of this government has been in the planning process, and now we are trying to play catch-up. These young people have been held in our watch houses as an alternate to youth detention.

If we go back to 25 March 1999, the Hon. Anna Bligh spoke about children in watch houses. Ultimately, what she was trying to say in her press release is that watch houses are not the right place for juveniles to be held. She said—

A range of practical proposals will be put to Government to help minimise the detention of young people in Queensland watchhouses.

That is what Anna Bligh said more than 20 years ago. The Labor government has been in government for all but 34 months of that time. Some of these children were not born. This is 10 years before they were born. We have seen a systemic failure in the system.

The bill has some meritorious points. I think we all want to reduce the period in which proceedings in the youth justice system are finalised. That is a worthy objective. We do not want to see children being held in the system forever trying to get their matters dealt with. We all know that these are complex situations. We know that there are terribly traumatic situations that children have had to grow up in, which is part of the cause of their offending.

The introduction of a new information sharing regime to assist government and non-government organisations to assess and respond to the needs of young people in the youth justice system is a good idea. The question is: what didn't we start in 1999 when Anna Bligh was already telling us that this was a problem? Why has it taken so long for the Labor government, which has been in government for this whole period, to come up with a solution for this problem? This is an intergenerational problem that has been caused by their own incapacity. I am not denying there are good intentions: I am denying an ability to solve the problem. They have shown no ability to solve the problem thus far. After 20 years of systemic failure from the Labor government, this bill is a very small step in moving forward to a solution.

There are elements in the bill that we can support, but I want to talk about breach of bail. I need to go back to Ian Leavers here, because one of the things he said is—

These juveniles belong behind bars to keep the community safe. They are on remand for offences such as rape and violent assaults. All of these offenders have appeared before magistrates and as we know, magistrates will often let almost anyone out on bail. So if even the magistrates think these offenders should be behind bars, then that's where they should be.

Ian Leavers is suggesting that some of these juveniles should be behind bars. What we do know is that they need early intervention and a whole-of-government solution. After 20 years of inaction this bill stumbles forward to some kind of machinery-of-government change.

The other issue that needs to be looked at is 72 hours in a watch house. I absolutely accept that that is going to be very difficult to achieve for the Police Service. What needs to happen is a complete and utter machinery-of-government change. Child safety and juvenile justice should be empowered, should have legislation and should be appropriately financed and supported to ensure that these children are not in there for 72 hours. It is not the responsibility of the police to look after them. They should be looked after by the appropriate organisation, the appropriate part of government, and that is why there needs to be a machinery-of-government change. Seventy-two hours in watch houses is possible if the government acts and changes the way it deals with these offenders.