




Speech By
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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Law and Order

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (2.45 pm): I rise to speak about government making choices and setting priorities. Clearly when a government does not maintain funding levels for one of its services you know that it is not its priority. Of course I am talking about law and order. Of course I am talking about the police. Yesterday I had a disturbing conversation with a friend of mine from North Queensland who was in Brisbane for business. I showed him what was going on in Townsville. He immediately stopped talking, picked up the phone, called his wife and said, 'Get off the street. If you go through a crossing, check carefully before you pull out, even if the light is green.' He was scared that his family would be in danger simply driving around Townsville. This is a despicable situation that this government has allowed to happen.

How on earth can a government say that it takes law and order seriously when it will not fund the previous budget levels, when it runs its frontline staff down by 610 officers? We hear announcements of officers being posted to different places at some point in the future. What we do not see is the number of officers climbing. What we do see climbing since the Palaszczuk government was elected and the Premier became the leader of this state is crime rates. Robberies have skyrocketed by 76 per cent. Unlawful use of motor vehicles is up 66 per cent. Assault has risen by 33 per cent. Unlawful entry is up by 28 per cent. These are the statewide numbers.

More concerningly, there are some communities being hit harder than others, and Townsville is certainly one of those. Townsville is being hit hard. Additional police officers were promised before the last election and hopefully will be delivered shortly before the next election so that the hardworking officers in Townsville can finally put the resources on the ground that they need to get a grip on the crisis that is going on there. In Townsville, robbery is up 137 per cent. Unlawful use of a motor vehicle—we saw some terrible vision of that yesterday—has increased 74 per cent under the Palaszczuk Labor government. These are the numbers that the police officers on the front line have to deal with.

It is even worse than that. If we have a look at the prisons and the overcrowding that is going on in Townsville, we find that prison officers are being assaulted to the point where the union is looking at walking off the job because there is a crisis not only in arresting the criminals but also in containing the criminals. I do not understand how on earth anybody can take a look at this government and think they can be serious about law and order. We have had the watch house debacle. We have had the breach of bail conditions taken away from juvenile offenders. We are 375 days away from an election. I know that the people of Townsville and the people of the Gold Coast are particularly interested in making sure that this government does not get a single day past that.

On the Gold Coast, assaults are up 117 per cent, shop stealing is up 87 per cent, robbery has increased 68 per cent, and unlawful use of a motor vehicle is up by 52 per cent. We all know the bikies are back. If anybody is unsure, they only need to go and check the bodies with the bullet holes in them down on the Gold Coast. It is horrendous for the people who live there. People should not be sitting in

their homes at night listening to gunfire. This is Queensland. What has happened to law and order in Queensland under this Palaszczuk Labor government? We have seen a weakening of the laws. Consorting laws are not worth the paper on which they are written. Under Labor's consorting laws there have been over 1,000 official warnings made by police, 10 charges and only two habitual convictions. This is terrible.

The people of the Gold Coast demand action. They are looking for officers. They are not looking for officers to be transferred from the south Gold Coast to the north Gold Coast or from one station to another. They are looking for more boots on the ground. Where are the 610 missing officers? We know that when the LNP was in office there were 245 officers per 100,000 people and there are now 233. The minister can say all he likes that he is increasing the police service, but it is not keeping up with population growth. In fact, if we were keeping up with population growth there would be 610 more officers in Queensland today and there are not. This minister needs to get serious on crime and the government needs to stop being so weak.