




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (6.49 pm): Community safety is paramount. I was really fascinated to hear some of the comments by the member for Mirani. Whilst he is a very good person, I have to query the rationale around putting gel blasters in the hands of children to distract them from screen time. As we know, there are many other avenues to distract our children from screen time, such as a very good biology book or a tennis racquet and a ball. Introducing gel blasters to children to get them away from screen time is drawing a long bow. The other concern that I have is the number of women and children who are dying in Australia as a result of domestic violence, so any opportunity we have to remove some of these replica weapons from the streets is important. The principle at the forefront of everything is that community safety is paramount, as I mentioned, and that principle is at the forefront of everything this government does.

In relation to the permanent firearms amnesty, in November 2019 the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management meeting resolved that a nationwide permanent firearms amnesty should be established by late 2020. This bill contains amendments which create a permanent, ongoing firearms amnesty for Queensland. Under the provisions, a person will not be able to be prosecuted for the unlawful possession of a firearm or a proscribed item if they are at, or proceeding directly to, a police station or approved dealer to relinquish that item. The Weapons Regulation will contain a condition that, when practicable, the person must notify the dealer or police station prior to attending. This is important, as we know, to assist police if a person intercepted by police in possession of a firearm falsely claims to be on their way to relinquish it. It allows police to make inquiries to determine if that is in fact what they are doing.

The bill also addresses the issue of gel blasters. The government has established a framework designed to support the gel blaster community into the future. All elements of the framework have been formulated with two objectives (1) to support the interests of retailers and individuals who are a part of this growing recreational activity and (2) to support the community's safety. The framework is based in commonsense arrangements that accommodate these two objectives. The framework actively encourages the owners of gel blasters to join recreational clubs so that they can enjoy the pastime with other enthusiasts in a safe environment. In relation to community safety, the framework has adopted commonsense proposals put forward by police. For example, gel blasters should be stowed securely in the owner's home and, when being carried in a public area, gel blasters should be hidden from view in a case or bag so as not to cause alarm.

It is important to note that the framework the government has introduced is partly in response to a worrying increase in the number of incidents involving the misuse of gel blasters. The government recognises that the vast majority of gel blaster owners use them responsibly. That is why the framework is based on supporting gel blaster recreational activities. In this regard, the framework encourages owners to join a gel blaster club, as that would constitute a reasonable excuse for owning one. The framework is not designed to punish responsible owners of gel blasters; it is simply a way of promoting the interests of enthusiasts as well as ensuring community safety.

Unlike the LNP, this government has no plans to ban gel blasters. 'I think Fair Trading should look into banning them,' Deb Frecklington MP, Leader of the Opposition, said on 7News Brisbane on 30 August 2018. That would be incredibly disappointing for the member of Kawana, who told parliament that he owned a number of gel blasters himself.

Queensland Corrective Services has a workforce of approximately 4,700 frontline staff that supervises almost 30,000 prisoners and offenders across Queensland every day. These operations are complex. Corrective services officers work with some of the most challenging people in our society. The government is committed to keeping our corrective services officers safe. Like any other workforce, corrective services officers should be able to attend work, perform their job and return home to their families without experiencing physical threats of violence. One assault on a corrective services officer is one too many. Ensuring their safety is a priority for this government.

A number of safety strategies have been implemented to increase officer safety in our prisons, including funding to increase staffing levels, the rollout of body worn cameras and load-bearing vests across Queensland prisons, and investment in violence reduction and prevention programs. Building on this work, the Corrective Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 includes an amendment to the Criminal Code to clarify the maximum penalty for a prisoner who seriously assaults a working corrective services officer. The amendment makes it clear that if a prisoner seriously assaults a corrective services officer in a correctional centre with aggravating circumstances, the maximum penalty is 14 years imprisonment. This legislative clarity is necessary to provide a strong deterrent to this type of behaviour and give reassurance to corrective services officers of the importance of their health and safety. As I said at the outset, community safety is of paramount importance to the Palaszczuk government. I commend this bill to the House.