




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOMERA

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (12.42 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Corrective Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. Broadly speaking, the LNP does not oppose the bill with exceptions, as we have heard throughout the debate. I note that the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee recommended that the bill be passed. The LNP members of the committee submitted a statement of reservation to highlight concerns around the regulation of gel blasters.

In December 2018 the Crime and Corruption Commission released a report titled *Taskforce Flaxton: an examination of corruption risks and corruption in Queensland's prisons* which focused on identifying corruption and risks of corruption in Queensland prisons. As a result of the investigation, the CCC held there were significant corruption risks in Queensland prisons and the existing anti-corruption framework is not effectively preventing, detecting or dealing with them. The objectives of the bill are to: respond to the immediate risks identified in the Taskforce Flaxton report; support the implementation of recommendations from the Queensland Parole System Review report; and improve operational experiences for QCS and the Parole Board Queensland.

In response to the Taskforce Flaxton report, Labor announced that it supports in principle all 33 recommendations. The bill adopts six of the recommendations, including: authorising the chief executive to require QCS staff to submit to alcohol and drug testing; granting broader powers to search staff working in corrective services facilities; improving property and exhibit management policies and practices to decrease corruption risk; broadening the remit of the ethical standards unit to provide prevention and early intervention, professional standards, integrity policy framework, complaints management, investigation and discipline systems; reviewing the service delivery model used to investigate criminal offences in prisons; and addressing the risk of inappropriate relationships between staff and prisoners or offenders. Other amendments include the appointment of inspectors to investigate alleged corruption of staff; however, unlike the investigation of an incident, there is no requirement for one of the two inspectors to be independent of the QCS.

Given that corruption is rife in Queensland prisons, it is paramount that investigations of prison staff are transparent and unbiased. While this provision is a step in the right direction, it does not go far enough in mitigating corruption. The new offence of prohibiting intimate relationships between staff members and offenders includes: sexual conduct or other physical expressions of affection or sexual contact; or the exchange of written or other forms of communication of a sexual nature. There is a maximum penalty of 100 penalty units or three years imprisonment. Persons registered on the victim register are allowed to apply to the Parole Board for an extension of time to provide a submission when parole is being considered by a prisoner.

I note that the Bar Association of Queensland raised concerns about the appointment of inspectors to investigate alleged misconduct or alleged corrupt conduct of a staff member, reinforcing the need for an independent entity with no professional ties to QCS to conduct an unbiased investigation. I think that is a very worthwhile suggestion by the Bar Association.

As noted earlier, the CCC made 33 recommendations to improve the performance of Queensland Corrective Services to: improve safety for staff and prisoners; ensure decisions are ethical and impartial; enhance accountability and transparency; and raise performance standards. In its submission, the CCC was critical about the bill failing to adopt recommendation 33 of the Taskforce Flaxton report, which would require the implementation of an independent inspectorate model to provide adequate oversight of QCS functions and activities, thus decreasing the risk of corruption in Queensland prisons. The report notes that the current QCS prison inspectorate model does not meet recognised international standards of independence. One would wonder why we would not want to go to that level of independence.

Queensland prisons are bursting at the seams and our prison officers being treated as punching bags, as has been noted in very recent times. Labor's only solution to prison overcrowding is to double up, but this is only exacerbating the violence and corruption. Indeed, I recently heard they are tripling up in some prison cells at the moment because of additional loads. The Crime and Corruption Commission's Taskforce Flaxton report, which was published in 2018, highlighted the risks associated with this and warned that overcrowding only exacerbates assaults in prison. The CCC has continuously warned that overcrowding can increase prisoners' anger and frustration and increase the risk of conflict, violence and serious assaults against prisoners and staff, and warned that overcrowding is related to decreases in prison time out of cell, which was also related to more prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, self-harm incidents and incidents requiring the use of force.

The Palaszczuk Labor government claims they have zero tolerance for violence in Queensland's correctional facilities, but their inaction clearly shows they do not have a plan to fix it. Overcrowded prisons means that prisoners are returning to our streets more violent than ever. If Labor cannot control our criminals in prisons, how do they expect to rehabilitate them? The LNP believes in delivering the rehabilitation and resources our prisoners need to reduce the risk posed by recidivist offenders to community safety.

In that regard, I have done quite a bit of work around Australia. I have been to many prisons and many organisations that are providing services to prisons and prisoners both here in Australia and in New Zealand. There are some excellent programs out there. As a result of this research, I now use an adage to help me explain these issues to people and it answers all of the issues on a broad basis. I refer to it as the AEIOU of the issue.

The 'A' stands for accommodation. If we expect prisoners to be released from prison—whether it be at the end of their sentence or on parole—and simply go back to where they came from and end up in the same place they were before they went into prison, then we are going to continue to see recidivist behaviour. We have to deal with the issue of appropriate accommodation for prisoners on release from prison. Without that, it is almost guaranteed that these prisoners will go back to prison. Depending on what research we look at, we see that anywhere between 45 per cent and 65 per cent of prisoners reoffend within just two years of returning to the streets. Much of that has to do with their accommodation situation in the very first place.

I then go to the training and education programs that we deploy whilst in the prison system, and the 'E' is for education. We need to provide our prisoners with appropriate opportunities for education, but I can say from my research that we are only delivering a small fraction of the programs we need to deliver, given the large number of prisoners who are incarcerated at this time. Something like 25 per cent of prisoners enjoy some form of education program. There is not enough budget to provide anything further than that. Education is the second point.

The 'I' is for integration and putting programs in place to show prisoners what is expected of them out in the community. Integrating into the community is important and we can only do that really well in the prison system.

The 'O' is for occupation. If we do not have employment opportunities for them outside the prisons and proper training for them inside the prisons to give them the skills they need, what chance have they got of getting gainful employment when they leave the prison system?

The 'U' is for understanding—that is, for them to understand what is expected of them in our communities and also for communities to understand that where they came from is not where we have necessarily come from in our lives and they may have had a tough life in the past. That is the AEIOU of the issue. We do have solutions available to us in reducing recidivism.

(Time expired)