




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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COMMUNITY BASED SENTENCES (INTERSTATE TRANSFER) BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (12.14 pm): I rise to speak on the Community Based Sentences (Interstate Transfer) Bill 2019. I note the objective of bill, which is to establish Queensland's participation in the national scheme for the formal transfer and enforcement of community based sentences between Australian jurisdictions. I acknowledge that the system is already operating under an informal arrangement and that the bill effectively formalises what is already occurring. I understand that there are inefficiencies in how this informal agreement operates. For example, under the current informal arrangement when an interstate offender has been transferred to Queensland and breaches the conditions Queensland has no power to initiate breach of action. The responsibility currently rests with the interstate jurisdiction to manage prisoners from their own jurisdiction. This is problematic because if a prisoner is residing in Queensland it is imperative that Queensland has the power to deal with that prisoner as it deems necessary.

The bill seeks to overcome these obstacles by giving power back to the state where the interstate prisoner resides. Under the new scheme the local authority, such as Queensland Corrective Services, may register an interstate sentence in Queensland at the request of an interstate authority for which the sentence is in force. Practically speaking, this means that New South Wales Corrective Services may request a prisoner be transferred to Queensland provided that request is approved by Queensland Corrective Services. Conversely, the local authority may apply to an interstate authority for a Queensland prisoner to serve their sentence in another state.

While I note the improvements that come with the bill and the favourable outcome of giving power back to the state in terms of prisoners who breach their conditions, I am concerned about the impact this may have on the number of interstate prisoners who are granted the luxury and privilege of living in Queensland. Currently, Queensland is a net exporter of prisoners serving community based sentences in other states, which means there are more Queenslanders serving their sentences in other states than there are interstate prisoners in Queensland. Recently in a public briefing on the bill the QCS confirmed that there are currently 87 interstate prisoners who are being handled by Queensland Corrective Services under an informal arrangement and 147 Queensland community based sentencing orders being informally administered by other jurisdictions.

There is no doubt that this formal process will make it easier for prisoners to transfer to Queensland, and what better place for a prisoner to reside. The Sunshine State has everything to offer and we do not want this legislation to be used to attract offenders on probation. It needs to be used for the correct purpose, which is to help reduce recidivism. The constant sunshine, pristine beaches and friendly people may provide reasons for an offender on probation or any other community based order to try to move to Queensland. We need to be cautious about that.

Before I can support this bill, I ask the minister to give his commitment that Queensland will not become a dumping ground for interstate offenders or a destination of choice for interstate prisoners. While Corrective Services advised the committee that, under the proposed legislation, there is not expected to be any significant increase in the number of offenders seeking a transfer into Queensland, I want the minister himself to provide a guarantee to this House that we will not become a net importer.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! The minister will have the opportunity to reply later.

Mr WATTS: I do not want Queensland to become a net importer of interstate prisoners living in the community, whom Queensland will then have to fund. The police and Corrective Services are already under-resourced and the last thing we need is for interstate offenders to take what is left of our vital crime prevention resources. Our hardworking police and Corrective Services need to be able to focus on preventing crime, which is skyrocketing here in Queensland, with robbery up 76 per cent, unlawful use of a motor vehicle up 66 per cent and assault up 33 per cent.

Mr RYAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. The bill is very specific in its purpose. It is about community based transfers. I ask you to bring the member back to the long title of the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have been listening closely to the member's speech. By and large, he is specifically addressing the bill. I will allow him to continue.

Mr WATTS: The transfer of prisoners to Queensland will need Queensland Corrective Services and police resources to be able to manage that. It is most relevant if crime in Queensland is already on the rise and our resources are already under pressure. We need to ensure that our Police Service and Corrective Services are prioritising the community over interstate offenders. If Queensland experiences a surge in numbers of interstate offenders, then Queensland taxpayers will have to fork out for the rehabilitation, supervision and other costs and support measures to be provided to these interstate offenders. Again, this is money that could be spent on reducing recidivism rates and preventing crime in Queensland. It is for these reasons that if the minister does not want me to oppose the bill, I am seeking an assurance that Queensland will not become a net importer of interstate people serving their community orders. I do not want it to become a dumping ground for interstate prisoners in our community. If the minister can give that assurance, then we will not be opposing the bill because, largely, the bill has good, formalised elements that we need.

Mr Ryan interjected.

Mr WATTS: I understand the minister is saying this is a national scheme, and that is all well and good. Resource the departments appropriately in the first place and my concerns would be lessened.