




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 23 February 2021

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Townsville, Youth Crime

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (2.20 pm): Townsville has endured great pain recently. A young woman with her whole life in front of her, with aspirations of joining the Queensland Police Service, lost her life on Friday, 5 February after being struck by an alleged vigilante who was pursuing a stolen car in Thuringowa. That young lady's name is Jennifer Board. It is a name that will remain with me and the Townsville community for a very long time to come. This senseless and tragic end to Jennifer's life should never have happened. It has rocked our community and deeply affected all of us. To Jennifer's family, friends and the community, I offer my sincere condolences. Our community is grieving as it comes to grips with this tragic event.

I have reached out to Jennifer's family and have recently personally spoken to Denise Bowen, carer and companion to Jennifer's father, Graham, just the day before Jennifer's funeral. I know from that conversation that the family has received much love and support from so many in our community, and I know that this is an incredibly difficult time for all who loved and knew Jennifer. The day after Jennifer's awful tragedy was not a day for politics; it was a day for her friends and loved ones to gather to support each other and grieve. My wife, Amanda, and I laid flowers at the memorial at sunset on that Saturday afternoon. I have spoken with the principal of the Weir State School, as this occurred right outside the school and I know it has affected many of the students and staff.

As a community, we simply cannot tolerate this lawless behaviour occurring on our streets. Just hours after the tragedy another stolen car in broad daylight was going down the wrong way of Riverway Drive at speed, putting more innocent people at risk, and I have heard reports today of this continued behaviour just hours ago.

Thuringowa is a place where we proudly raise our families, where we connect through a broad range of activities. The good people of my community are law-abiding citizens, but none of us can allow or tolerate this criminal behaviour that places our community at risk. It is just not acceptable. I have told my constituents that I will do all in my power to ensure this never happens again. This means taking tough action and strengthening our legislation around bail. I welcome the recent announcements from the Premier. They are strong but necessary steps and will help make our community safer.

I also echo the calls from police to stop any forms of vigilante behaviour. Police do an outstanding job of arresting and charging offenders and putting them in custody, helping make our communities safe, but I note that in the contributions of the Leader of the Opposition there was not one mention of this despicable vigilante behaviour which was certainly a causal factor in Jennifer's death.

I know that each Townsville MP is committed to the people of Townsville and to tackling this very serious issue to help make our community safer by ensuring these serious offenders are off our streets. I called for a local task force—I thank the police minister, who picked up the phone immediately—to concentrate on catching these offenders and placing them before the courts. Many remain in custody due to the outstanding response from our police, and I commend them for their response in catching those serious criminals.

Our work to date with our five-point action plan, announced last year, has achieved positive results so far. Figures show that youth offending is down by 30 per cent, but we have a very serious problem with 10 per cent of the worst offenders who are responsible for nearly 50 per cent of crimes being committed. We now strengthen that response to target that core group of recidivist offenders.

I know that our communities want more action by government. In the previous term we delivered an additional 104 police. We have committed to another 150. We changed the legislation that said serious offenders must not get bail. Following on from previous contributions by opposition members, I make the point that this is a time to rise above. Those opposite should not get stuck nine years in the past with a proposal proven to have failed. They should join with us. I ask opposition members to join with us when a bill comes before the House, in a bipartisan fashion, to help make our communities safer.

I have read recent media reports of magistrates saying, 'I am required to assess if you are a serious risk to the community. You are and you are not getting bail.' We have introduced a raft of programs to stop people offending in the first place—Project Booyah, Transition 2 Success and the Pathways, Clontarf and on-country programs—but these recent announcements are aimed at the 10 per cent of recidivist offenders who have no regard for public safety. Let's do this. Let's get it through the House. Let's do it for Jennifer.