




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (3.46 pm): I rise to support the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. Townsville has certainly not been immune from the impacts of serious youth crime, as you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker Walker. It was interesting to listen to the member for Nanango's contribution. She wanted to talk about history but conveniently stopped at 2016.

I have found some comments of the former LNP member for Mundingburra and now Leader of the Opposition. On social media in 2013 he made comments about youth crime being a big issue for the north. He said that an offence of breach of bail would be created where a young person commits an offence while on bail for another offence. Are members confused? Me too. It failed, and we all know that. I table those comments from social media.

In 2014 he talked about youth crime being the biggest problem facing our city. I am pretty sure this looks like a five-point plan. He said—

While this alone isn't going to fix the problem, the fact boot camps are now underway and police numbers are increasing—

We know all about their boot camps. There is another one with a nice picture of Campbell which talks about 22 police for the Kirwan rapid action patrol hub. I table those comments from social media.

Tabled paper: Bundle of extracts from social media posts of the former member for Mundingburra, Mr David Crisafulli MP, dated 28 May 2014, 16 January 2014 and 26 September 2013, relating to government action on youth crime [532](#).

He said 22 police. The minister knows—and I thank him for it—that we were able to double that. It was a half-baked idea. That patrol now has 46 staff and is working. They are doing a great job. We should put this bill into context by reminding ourselves of the failures of the LNP to address youth crime with their failed boot camps. There were reoffending rates of 65 per cent. They hid crime data from community sight. Their breach of bail, as they call it, failed. Some 90 per cent of people reoffended. They are the facts.

The Labor government does not shy away from the fact that there is a serious issue with a core group of about 10 per cent of serious recidivist offenders who do not have regard for community safety or even their own, which has resulted in tragedies in our community. Our community deserves to feel safe. That is why we continue to build upon previous investments such as the 53 police we delivered in 2017. We are committed to another 150 police for Townsville. We also introduced legislative change in this space in 2020 by amending a section of the Youth Justice Act to say that serious offenders must not get bail.

Now with this suite of reforms in this bill before us we can further build on previous changes by holding people to account and help make our communities safe. I had the opportunity to join the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee in Townsville. I thank the committee for coming to Townsville and for their considered work and their tabled report. The committee heard from around 30 people who came before us over the two public hearings. We heard that they want a safe community, and they provided their views on the reforms such as the GPS monitoring and reversal of the presumption of bail.

As a local member I was able to speak before the committee. I reflected on the fact that the victims of crime I have spoken to also want change, to hold people to account and to have a safe community. The focus of this bill is to deal with that small cohort of hardcore repeat youth offenders who account for around 50 per cent of all crime.

Our new laws will reverse the onus so that young offenders charged with a serious indictable offence while on bail will need to show the court why they are not a risk of reoffending and are not a danger to the community before they can be granted bail. Clause 24 of the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will insert a new section—section 48AF—into the Youth Justice Act which will require a court or police officer to refuse to release a child from custody unless the child shows why their detention in custody is not justified. This means that this cohort of hardcore, recidivist youth offenders will be refused bail unless they can convince the bail decision-makers they are not a risk to community safety.

We have heard from some people—some local media and LNP speakers here today—of the LNP's failed breach of bail and how they would like it reintroduced. There is nothing quite like looking at the facts. It was never really a breach of bail; it was an offence of 'finding of guilt whilst on bail', which has colloquially become known as 'breach of bail'. Of the 185 people convicted of that offence, 90 per cent reoffended within 12 months. It failed. They are the facts.

The LNP's breach of bail offence is not needed, as the bill we are debating today will reinforce the existing legislative framework that clearly states that young people should be refused bail when they are an unacceptable risk to the community. This is a far more sensible approach to this serious issue than the LNP's unworkable breach of bail proposal.

I want to end by addressing some very concerning commentary from former failed LNP candidate and former KAP candidate for Thuringowa, Ms Julianne Wood. This is the same person who runs the Take Back Townsville group and organised rallies that she said she was never, ever doing over the last couple of years for political advantage. That aside, this is the same person who, despite all the bluff and blunder on social media, failed to attend the public hearings in Townsville to have her say or represent that group.

Instead, she chooses to make commentary on Facebook that these hearings were a 'performance' and a 'stunt'. She said, 'They would have paid their supporters to lodge submissions and be at that event to backup the government'. I will table those comments.

I have sought advice from the Clerk about these particular comments. They are repugnant. They are outrageous and rubbish claims that, in my view, bring into question the integrity of our committees, the chair and members—and I note that the member for Hinchinbrook was also a member of that visiting committee—and bring into question the integrity of the portfolio committee's work in this parliament. I will be writing to the Speaker on this. I also table a copy of her Facebook page where she continues to label herself as the KAP candidate for Thuringowa.

Tabled paper: Extracts from social media posts, undated, by Ms Julianne Wood relating to youth crime [533](#).

That is very concerning. This ill-informed commentary is typical of those who oppose any government bills and try to push their own political agenda like the KAP 'relocation sentencing proposal'. I note that this person continues to advertise herself as the KAP candidate. Someone should inform her that the election was over in October 2020. She lost, as did the former LNP candidate, Natalie Marr, who also labels herself as a public figure who, like an LNP puppet, calls for breach of bail saying that it is the only way to fix the issue. I would ask both those former failed candidates to educate themselves—the LNP breach of bail as an offence was a complete failure! Of 185 people, 90 per cent reoffended.

This issue needs us all working together. I take the point that the member for Burdekin and shadow minister made yesterday in his contribution: all levels of government should work together. I agree with the member. We all should work together, but I ask the member to write to the federal member for Herbert, who continues to play the blame game, who continues to pull cheap stunts in front of MPs' offices and continues to handball the issue of crime back to the state. I would welcome the member for Burdekin to engage with the federal member. I have certainly written to him to say, 'Let's all work together.'

Finally, I want to thank the Minister for Police and Minister for Youth Justice and the senior leadership of our government who have listened to the communities in Queensland, like mine in Thuringowa, and have committed to making serious change through this serious suite of reforms which I know will bring change. We should not write these reforms off. There are members opposite, media commentators and keyboard warriors out there who have written them off before they have even had a chance to be passed. These are good reforms that are needed for our government to make serious change in youth offending.

In time, I look forward to the reviews to see how these particular reforms have impacted our communities—which have had a gutful of the 10 per cent of those hardcore youth offenders—in a positive way. It is time for change. To those failed candidates: this is how you effect change. You effect change by coming into this place, listening to your community and bringing in real reforms. Sitting on the sidelines throwing rocks does not effect change. That does nothing.

I welcome this suite of reforms. I welcome the support we have from the Premier and all of the ministers involved. I look forward to Townsville flipping this and becoming the positive, vibrant city that it is. We are a proud city. I commend the bill to the House.