




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 12 October 2021

**YOUTH JUSTICE (MONITORING DEVICE CONDITIONS) AMENDMENT
REGULATION**

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (5.59 pm): I rise to speak against the motion. As the member for Thuringowa, I will never apologise for advocating vigorously for my community. I will never apologise for advocating for community safety. I will never apologise for advocating for strong laws to target those few—that small cohort—who choose to do harm to the community. Yes, I advocated strongly for the suite of youth justice reforms introduced by the government, backed by the LNP, because we needed them. They are the strongest laws in the nation. The presumption against bail is at the heart of those reforms. It is aimed fairly and squarely at recidivist youth offenders. It is aimed at that small group of hardcore offenders who wish to and choose to do harm to the community.

I have regular interactions with Assistant Commissioner Mark Wheeler in Townsville. He tells me that these laws are working. More young people are being held to account. There are more reports in the *Townsville Bulletin* of hardcore recidivist offenders being denied bail because community safety is paramount. There are more serious youth offenders in custody than there were a year ago. I do not apologise for that. Those people would not be in custody if they had not done harm to the community. Their rights do not rise above the rights of innocent, law-abiding members of the community. The rights of people who choose to break into homes and choose to steal cars are not above the rights of victims. It is victims who come through our office doors and tell us of the terrifying incidents that have happened to them. Community safety is and must remain paramount.

We do not live in a perfect world. In a utopian world no-one would want to see people locked up. I wish all young people grew up in supportive families and went on to live productive, satisfying lives, but unfortunately a small cohort of young people choose to go down the path of recidivist offending. They go down that path and cause great harm to our community. Townsville has been no stranger to that.

I make no apology for the government's targeting of these serious recidivist offenders with the strongest laws in the nation because it is about our community being safe. Let us be very clear about this. The presumption against bail is a key element of the government's reforms. It means more recidivist offenders are being held accountable and placed in custody for longer. One element of the reforms is a trial recommended by former police commissioner Bob Atkinson. That trial is currently underway. The courts may consider fitting a GPS monitoring device to an offender who is 16 or 17 years of age. The court will only make that order if it is satisfied that the offender resides with a responsible adult who will ensure the conditions of the GPS monitoring order are complied with. If the court is not so satisfied, the offender remains in custody because community safety is paramount. That is what is happening.

The guiding principle of the government's reforms is community safety. It overrides other considerations. It must come first. It is important to note that these reforms target that small cohort of serious recidivist offenders. Police say that 80 to 90 per cent of young offenders will have only one or two interactions with police and never reoffend. The offenders the government is targeting are the 10 per cent of offenders who are serious recidivist offenders. This small cohort is responsible for nearly half of all the crime committed by youth offenders.

The government is not forgetting about the vast majority of young people whose lives can be turned around. We have co-responder teams and police and youth justice workers actively going out in the community and engaging with young people in a bid to connect with these young people and give them the support they need to live a productive life. I give a shout-out to the co-responder team in Townsville and acknowledge the work they are doing.

That is not all we are doing. Transition 2 Success is a terrific program turning young people's lives around and getting them back into education, skills or training. It has an over 80 per cent success rate. The kids that go into that program do not reoffend. Eighty per cent is a pretty high mark. The same applies for Project Booyah. It is stopping kids, that small cohort, from getting into the horrible lane where they choose to—

Mr Healy: Great outcomes.

Mr HARPER: I agree with the member for Cairns. Project Booyah is something that should be celebrated. Over 88 per cent of those kids are not reoffending and are getting back into education, skills or training.

In Townsville we have the On Country program, as does Cairns and Mount Isa. Representatives from Gr8motive came before the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee last year and articulated the very good work happening in that space. I commend the minister for the work that is done. We need to provide those supports. We also have Pathways State College. We have the Clontarf Foundation in our schools in Kirwan, Thuringowa and Heatley. We also have the Stars Foundation. The work they are doing is fundamental in making sure those kids get an education. I went to every single one of their graduations last year. Not one media person was there. Forty-eight of those kids picked up employment skills and training. These are the outcomes we want to see.

There is nothing better than hearing these stories. I will tell the story of Cloudy, a young man who was in the wrong group and reoffending. He went through Transition 2 Success. He has absolutely turned his life around. I saw him proudly working on the Townsville stadium. He is now a mentor for the Transition 2 Success pathways program. He is inspiring others to do the right thing, to stay out of the wrong lane and to get back into education, skills or training. They are the supports that are important, but we must hold those serious youth offenders to account. We cannot forget about community safety.

Those serious offenders are being put before the courts. Many do remain in custody. I hope they turn their lives around. I hope they get into the Transition 2 Success program and turn their lives around, but we must make no apologies for holding people to account. Community safety must always come first.