




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 12 October 2021

YOUTH JUSTICE (MONITORING DEVICE CONDITIONS) AMENDMENT REGULATION

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (6.07 pm): I rise to speak against the disallowance motion moved by the member for Maiwar. Quite simply, now is not the time to let up on the fight against youth crime. If anything, now is the time to make a difference and ramp it up because, using this government's own figures and responses, we are losing the battle to make our community safe.

According to the Queensland Police Service annual report for 2020-21, youth reoffending has increased to 75 per cent, a 10 per cent increase since 2018 and the highest rate since 2014. Interestingly enough, the Minister for Children and Youth Justice advised that the figures were only available until 2019. That is despite the QPS annual report stating that the measure is currently used by the QPS and the minister's own department. To reduce the options available to police to monitor juvenile offenders when youth reoffending is increasing would be a major step backwards.

Is it any wonder that youth reoffending is on the increase when this government is unwilling or unable to tell our communities the truth when it comes to youth crime. For years now, this government has referred to the role played in tackling youth crime by projects. We just heard from the member for Thuringowa about Project Booyah, but again he is being less than truthful—

Mr HARPER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I take personal offence at the member's statement and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr LAST: I withdraw. Communities like Townsville have been told that this program results in a 50 per cent reduction in offending by Project Booyah participants. Up to half of the participants in that project do not even have a record of offending. To then say that 76 per cent—if you listen to the member for Thuringowa, he is now claiming 88 per cent—of participants have either not reoffended or have dramatically reduced offending patterns defies the test of logic and is another example of the misinformation being peddled by this government. Again, to remove a tool that police use to monitor and reduce crime in these circumstances is something that I cannot support.

It is essential that Queenslanders remember that the use of GPS monitoring devices is a trial—a trial that to date no doubt leaves a lot to be desired. To my knowledge, only one offender has been fitted with a GPS monitoring device in Townsville. To put it bluntly, this Labor government has failed on youth crime again. Again, we have seen media conferences and big words from the police minister and, of course, the three Townsville Labor MPs. Again, it is just words. Let me be very clear that the problems with the GPS monitoring trial do not sit at the feet of the Queensland Police Service; they sit firmly at the feet of this Labor government.

Despite the fact that the biggest cohort of recidivist young offenders are aged 15, they are not eligible for the trial. Despite the fact that several Townsville postcodes are mentioned in the regulation, we find that there are coverage issues in many of those suburbs, so GPS monitoring devices cannot be put on juvenile offenders in some of those areas.

Based on this motion and other legislation he has introduced in this House, it is obvious that the member for Maiwar and I both agree that this government's approach to youth crime is destined for failure. However, our recommendations to this government are very different. I would like to explain why. Every single day my office and I receive calls from victims of crime and, concerning, those crimes are no longer an opportunistic thief stealing a few dollars or a few small items from an unlocked home.

Mr Harper interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Member for Thuringowa, please cease all interjections.

Mr LAST: It is vital for members of this House to understand the truth when it comes to youth crime before casting their vote on removing a tool, and GPS monitoring device technology is a tool that is available to police—police who are out there day in, day out doing their absolute best to keep our communities safe. In recent weeks we have seen victims threatened with knives. We have seen victims having their own cars driven at them. They have been dragged out of cars and bashed. They have had their cars stolen at knifepoint. They are not petty crimes. These offenders are a danger to the community as a whole.

We have seen police vehicles rammed and pelted with bricks resulting in injuries to police. It is nothing but sheer good luck that none of our police have been seriously injured or even killed. I have even had seasoned police officers expressing to me their fears of driving around the streets of Townsville late at night.

This is a crisis that has become Townsville's worst nightmare. The member for Thuringowa might like to put a positive spin on it and tell this place that it is reducing and that it is under control, but I can assure the House that it is far from that in that community. What concerns me is that this level of crime is becoming the norm. I had a gentleman talk to me on Saturday. He said, 'We only had a dozen cars stolen on the weekend—only a dozen.' That is a pretty good result, he thought. That is a concern. It should concern every single member in this place that that level of complacency is now creeping into our community and we are now accepting that as the norm.

People of all backgrounds are victims of crime every day in places like Townsville due to juvenile offenders. The member for Maiwar stands up in this place and talks about human rights, but what about the rights of the victims? What about those people who had their car stolen and are now on foot and left to pick up the pieces because their car has been burnt or driven into the Ross River? What about those people? What about kids being terrorised in their own homes because these young offenders have broken in and stolen the keys to their vehicles and threatened their parents?

The people of Townsville are sick and tired of broken promises when it comes to crime. The promise to trial GPS monitoring technology is one promise that must be kept. Unfortunately for the people of Townsville, Mackay, Cairns and many other centres in Queensland, this government has form when it comes to breaking promises on crime and, once again, has shown its complete contempt for those victims, for parents concerned about the welfare of their children and for small business owners who are constantly dealing with theft and damage to their premises.

Stolen cars travelling in convoy through the streets have led to people stopping at green lights now to make sure there is not a stolen vehicle headed their way. Crime is that common now that it barely makes the front page of the local paper. To add insult to injury, we have those Townsville members standing up in this place trying to tell us that it is under control.

As I have said before, and as a former police officer, I cannot vote in favour of removing one of the few tools available to our police because our police officers are already stretched beyond breaking point. Anecdotal information shows that on 7 October at 9 pm police were tasked to seven code 2 jobs. What does that mean? They are jobs that require an urgent response—lights and sirens. However, there was, according to my information, only enough police to handle the first four incidents. I can tell members of this House that police put on that blue uniform every day in an effort to keep people safe. To have three code 2 jobs outstanding is something that would cut at the very soul of every single police officer, but that failure is not theirs. The failure sits at the feet of this government.

Members would be aware that, when this government introduced the legislation to allow our courts to mandate the fitting of a GPS monitoring device, the LNP supported that legislation. As we have said all along, it was a small step forward following deaths in Brisbane and in Townsville. While we supported the legislation, the implementation of that legislation leaves a lot to be desired. At that time I questioned—and I continue to ask—why this government failed to take decisive action despite the crowds of victims who attended multiple crime forums in Townsville alone. It is a sad fact that, in the year ending 30 June this year, more vehicles were stolen in Queensland than in either New South Wales or Victoria and it was more than five times the other states combined. That is a disgraceful statistic. It is a sad fact that people in Townsville and other centres use the phrase 'how many more people need to die before the government does something?'

The need for GPS monitoring of juvenile offenders is the direct result of this Labor government's failures. It is only recently that this government realised the importance of early intervention—something that we have been calling for on this side of the House for years. The fact that I must speak against this disallowance motion is proof that Labor has failed when it comes to keeping Queenslanders safe from crime. It is those failures that have led to the current situation on the streets of Townsville and other centres. It is those failures that mean that people are living in fear. It is those failures that are stretching our police beyond breaking point. It is those failures that mean I cannot support this motion. I call on all members of this House to oppose this motion tonight.