




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (3.59 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. This is an issue that I am unfortunately very familiar with. This problem has been growing, but it has not always been like this in the north-west and in Mount Isa in particular. Whilst I have been in this job I have seen a slow increase and there has been a more acute incline in the rate of criminal activity committed by youths in the north-west. There are a number of factors that contribute to that and I want to talk about those issues. I also flag that we have a number of amendments, and I pay tribute to the member for Hinchinbrook for doing all of the heavy lifting in providing some alternatives that are missing in what the government has done.

The government has missed a very valuable opportunity to not only try to deal with this situation significantly but also send a message to those people in remote areas that this issue is as big for us in the south-east making decisions as it is for them up north. I can assure everyone that this is a burning issue in places like Townsville, Cairns and Mount Isa at the moment. It is really unfair and cruel to treat those people by saying, 'The problem's not too bad and we're dealing with it.' Just offering them tinkering around the edges is bordering on cruel because they expect more from government. They pay taxes to keep us here and employ us and they expect us to stand up and do something material.

I want to offer some observations that I have made during my time in this place in dealing with this issue. Firstly, there seems to be a lot of confusion in terms of the agenda peddled by the government that there has been a reduction in crime. That has been a message that has been driven by the government which I think is completely false. I collected some data from my area, but all of the evidence comprehensively shows the opposite. Over the month of February 2021 in Townsville there were a total of 2,547 offences committed, making the offence rate 1,098 per 100,000 people. In the Cairns LGA there were 1,278 offences, making that rate 1,500 per 100,000 people. In Mount Isa there were 475 offences, making it the gold medal winner at 2,662 offences per 100,000 people.

I could be accused of what I am accusing the government of in that it is a really narrow lens to say that we are the worst, because it would appear to me that some of the offences happening in Cairns and Townsville seem a lot more intense. This goes to the point that the government cannot just look at the data alone and say, 'Gee whiz, we've done a good job.' Rather, it has to talk to people on the ground and observe what is happening. What I have observed is a sharp increase of people coming through my electorate office saying, 'What are you doing about this? I've got a big problem. I've lived here for 40 years. My 80-year-old mother has just been strangled by a young kid. She's been broken into for the fifth time. She's been living here all her life. She's 80 years old. She's not used to this and she's being targeted because she keeps cash around the premises. What am I supposed to do, because I'm an aged man myself and my mum's distraught?' That was Heiner Schulz with his mother.

What about Kim-Maree Burton who has been woken by another young kid coming into her bedroom in the night after being repeatedly broken into? She was born and bred in Mount Isa. She loves the place. She wants to live there, but she is at her wit's end asking, 'What do we do?' The police

are saying, 'Well, there's not much more we can do. We can try to pick them up.' At the other end of the spectrum butcher Steve Clausen has been broken into again and had his butcher shop smashed up. Steve volunteers for everything around his son such as footy and sponsors everything around town. Jeff Marshall at SportsPower has kids yakking at him indicating that they will come back to steal from him the next night, which they do, when he politely tries to direct them around the shop.

We cannot ignore these stories, and they are getting worse and worse. As MPs we go to the government trying to be as constructive as we can to say, 'Here's the problem and here are some solutions as best as we can work them out,' and some of these solutions are real. We have been peddling relocation sentencing for years and I cannot find one person where I live—even in Townsville or Cairns—who disagrees. They just say, 'Anything, but it's a good idea and that needs to happen.' The best excuse we get for not doing it is that there is no evidence to support it. Is that how we always conduct our decision-making? There needs to be some strength in decision-making to say, 'There's no evidence, but I can see how that would work and logic would say that that would work.' There is evidence. I remember going to Urandangi a few years ago, and Urandangi is a pretty bleak landscape. There is no mobile phone service there and there is not much on offer. There is a pub and probably about two houses.

Mr Bennett: A school.

Mr KATTER: There is a school; I know the member for Burnett worked at the school. There are old houses where people are basically living in squalor with no water connected to the houses and no power, but there was a good couple living there at the time who had a number of foster kids as well as their own kids and they were disciplining those kids at home. I went to the school and there were about 12 kids, and I could not believe it. These kids were neatly dressed. The teachers would clap their hands and the kids would start reading their books. I can tell the House that that was the best behaved class pound for pound that I have walked into—all First Australian kids. The teacher said that one of those kids had done a horrendous crime in Mount Isa, and I knew well at the time what the crime was. I said, 'He looks like one of the best kids.' He said, 'He is.' I said, 'What's the secret?' He said, 'Not much. I'm giving them attention and the parents discipline them at home and that's about it.'

The key was that they were remote. There were no distractions. There were no cars to ride around in. There was no big city. They were remote, and that is the principle to keep focused on. That is the evidence. They were the kids who played up in town. If you talk to anyone in Urandangi they say, 'The kids are always good when they're here. It's when they go to Mount Isa that they play up.' That is part of the answer then, isn't it? The next thing we have to be aware of is that kids need to be active. If we just try to sit them down and teach them something in school or if we say, 'They must be learning cultural things, and that's all they can do,' that is not going to work. Kids want to move around, they want to run around and they want to do things. We have to keep their hands busy, so we need space to be able to achieve that. It is very hard to do that when they are cooped up in Cleveland, but it is easy to do a bit of fencing or try some activities with kids. It does not have to be about cattle work, but that is an easy one to do out there.

They are the sorts of things that we can do when we get them out there. It does not need to be any one program that is built around relocation sentencing, but there are a number of programs that will work, and I acknowledge that there are a number of effective programs. However, this is the point: a judge cannot force people to go to these programs, and that is a really critical element that we are missing in all of this. It is either send them to Cleveland or put them back on the street on bail, and half of the kids are not even scared of going to Cleveland anyway. Like they say, they wear that like a badge. Whether there are ankle bracelets or not, it is irrelevant.

The point is there are only two options for the magistrate. He knows Cleveland is full anyway and so do the police, so we are having—surprise, surprise—a slowdown in the reports of crimes because people are now ringing Policelink and Policelink say, 'Go online and check this out.' If an 80-year-old mum rings Policelink, they are told, 'You'd better go online to report this.' The 80-year-old says, 'I don't really go online much.' They are then told, 'We'd much prefer you go online.' They are arguing with people to go online to report these things, so guess what happens? Even when the police do turn up they are saying that they are exasperated and say, 'There's not much we can do,' so not everything is being reported. If the government wants to keep coming back and saying that the data is not suggesting this or that, just talk to people on the ground and they will tell you what is going on.

It is very frustrating that we are not adopting some of these practices, and here is the good news for everyone: when building something out in the bush it does not need to be as prescriptive as it is in the regulations now to build a youth detention centre, so that reduces the costs to nothing. It would look just like a mining camp out in the middle of nowhere. It would have the room to look after the kids just as well, but there is no need for a fence because where are they going to go? That is when we can start

connecting with these kids and start to turn these things around. We have not even talked—there is not enough time—about what the problems are at home, because at some stage the kids have to go home. This is about trying to do something meaningful with them when you get them. Relocation sentencing has to be the focus. Call it whatever you want, but the principles are remoteness and the ability of the magistrate to be able to force them to do something, because at the moment they lack the ability to do anything other than send them to Cleveland or home.

While I am on my feet in the short remaining time—and I regret that I have to do this—I have to comment on the contribution by the member for Thuringowa, who used some of his time to point out Julieanne Wood, who is not here to defend herself. People attack me all of the time. If the member wants to do that, deal with it at home. He does not have to bring it down here. Julieanne Wood did not run to make a big name for herself. I had to convince her to run for politics. She was a member of the community sticking up for herself, as we should do. I listen to those people because they help you get the right answers, member for Thuringowa, and that is why you should listen to them.

(Time expired)