




Speech By
Hon. Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. SJ STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Resources) (4.30 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. This is an important bill for the entire state. No amount of crime is acceptable. We make no apologies for targeting hardcore, repeat offenders who place our community in danger. In Townsville and Queensland there is a small percentage of juveniles committing the majority of these crimes. The government has moved quickly and decisively while engaging with the community about this serious issue.

The data shows that a majority of youth offenders do not continually repeat offend, with many not reoffending after their first interaction with police. Although this is encouraging, the statistics show that there is still a hardcore group of recidivist youth offenders causing significant harm in the community. This cohort of recidivist offenders, representing around 10 per cent of all youth offenders, accounts for about 48 per cent of all youth offending. These are sobering statistics, but that is why we have introduced these amendments to parliament. We make no apology for coming down hard on these offenders as community safety is absolutely vital.

The new measures include a trial of GPS electronic monitoring devices as a condition of bail for recidivist high-risk offenders aged 16 and 17 in places like Townsville. The new laws will create a presumption against bail for youth offenders arrested for committing further serious indictable offences such as unlawful use of a motor vehicle while on bail. Courts will need to seek assurances from parents and guardians that bail conditions will be complied with before an offender is released. Further, this bill will allow courts to consider the option of electronic GPS monitoring devices for 16- and 17-year-olds as a condition of bail on a trial basis, with Townsville selected as one of those trial sites.

Anti-hooning laws will also be strengthened to hold the registered owner of a vehicle responsible, except in cases where the vehicle is stolen or the owner can identify the other driver. This will encourage the owners of vehicles that may be stolen by young offenders to work collaboratively with police to help stop this dangerous behaviour.

Those opposite have had nothing to offer except failed policies and ideas. Breach of bail is what they continually talk about. Guess what? It did not work when they were in government. The LNP's offence was confusing and did not work. To make their current push to reintroduce this offence even more disconcerting, in 2015 the courts ruled that young people could not be given any additional penalty for an offence if they were convicted, because it was double punishment and contrary to the Criminal Code. Furthermore, of the 185 young people convicted of the LNP's breach of bail offence, over 90 per cent reoffended within 12 months and 94 per cent reoffended within two years. In Townsville, fewer than 40 young people were convicted of this new offence while it was in effect—that is fewer than 20 young people a year on average—with over 90 per cent reoffending within 12 months. Their policy simply failed. Then the LNP came up with its barely explained curfew policy during the last election campaign. The LNP could not say where these kids would be taken. Police officers in Townsville said it simply would not work.

The opposition police spokesperson, the member for Burdekin, Dale Last, told the *Townsville Bulletin* that he would not stand in the way of these amendments. That is because this government actually has a plan to tackle youth crime. We will not bury our heads in the sand and do nothing about it. It is an issue in Townsville, right across Queensland and in the rest of the country.

Earlier this year, Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll was in Townsville backing these important changes. As the commissioner said, they should not be looked at in isolation but, rather, as a suite of changes that will work with each other. I also welcome the announcement of the Youth Justice Taskforce, led by Queensland Police Service Assistant Commissioner Cheryl Scanlon. For many years I worked with the assistant commissioner when she was in Townsville and we worked together in schools. I cannot think of a better person to lead this very important task force. I also take this opportunity to welcome the announcement last month of the appointment of Mark Wheeler as the new assistant commissioner for the northern region, which includes Townsville. This year the northern region will be split into two—Far North and North—demonstrating the importance this government places on North Queensland.

We back our police with stronger laws and greater resources. Before the last election we announced the biggest investment in policing in three decades. This government is delivering an extra 2,025 police personnel across Queensland, with 150 of these being deployed in the North Queensland region. This is in contrast to those opposite, whose plan at the election was to cut those numbers by 90 in Townsville alone. The LNP also said that it would not bring in an extra 50 personnel for a Townsville based Policelink call centre or invest \$30 million in a new Kirwan Police Station. This just means more cuts. We back them; they sack them.

We are also backing the youth justice system. Since 2017 we have invested \$20.4 million delivering youth justice programs in and around Townsville. From 2019 to 2023 we are investing more than \$45 million in programs and services responding to youth crime. Programs like the very successful Project Booyah and Transition 2 Success are incredibly important as they do change lives. Investment in early intervention is important as it stops young people falling into a life of crime. We do not want them to become repeat offenders or to end up in the justice system. Make no mistake: all of these measures, including the amendments to the Youth Justice Act, will help keep our community safe.

There is no easy fix for youth crime, but these amendments that target those hardcore, recidivist offenders—along with the investment this government is making in youth justice and the Queensland Police Service—are essential. The Palaszczuk government takes community safety incredibly seriously. No amount of crime is acceptable. It is important that these measures are not looked at in isolation but, rather, as I said previously, as a suite of reforms targeting a small, hardcore group of repeat offenders.

The Palaszczuk government delivers on its promises. We have a plan for Queensland. Our plan is to build safer communities and stronger regional economies in places like Townsville and to create jobs for Queenslanders at a time when jobs and job security are more important than ever before. I commend the bill to the House.