




Speech By
Hon. Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Record of Proceedings, 26 May 2021

MOTION

Youth Crime

 **Hon. SJ STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Resources) (5.25 pm): The Palaszczuk government has introduced a range of changes targeting hardcore recidivist youth offenders. This includes introducing tougher bail laws, which means that recidivist offenders will stay in custody unless they can convince a court they are no longer a risk to community safety. This is important as it reverses the onus of bail. These new laws have only been in place for less than a month and already we are seeing results. Just last week police said that, in the 20 days since the laws targeting recidivist offenders were put in place, they have arrested more than 50 juvenile offenders and half of those were already being held in custody. As Northern Region Assistant Commissioner Mark Wheeler said, 'Those figures would suggest that these laws are working.'

Also as part of the suite of changes courts will need to seek assurances from parents and guardians that bail conditions will be complied with before an offender is able to be released. The courts in Townsville have already cited this new legislation during a recent case. We introduced a trial of electronic monitoring devices for 16- and 17-year-olds which gives courts more options yet again. Importantly, the Palaszczuk government continues to back our police force with more personnel, more resources and more facilities. During the election we announced there will be 2,025 new police personnel deployed throughout Queensland, including 150 new staff for the northern region. Contrast that with those opposite, whose election announcement meant a cut of 90 in the northern region alone. We back 'em; they sack 'em.

There is no single solution for youth crime. What I will say is that any instance of crime is unacceptable, but the new laws this government has introduced are already seeing results. They have been welcomed by Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll and the Queensland Police Service. The LNP's only plan for youth crime was a thought bubble: curfew policy. Where were they going to go? Thought bubble again: let's round them up and put them in the PCYC so police can look after them through the night. What happens with them the next morning? Another great thought bubble: we will charge parents \$250 to pick them up. What happens if parents do not pick them up? 'I'll get back to you.' Is it any wonder senior police in Townsville said this policy would not work? Here we are once again having to tread old ground with the nonsense the LNP are trotting out about breach of bail.

Mr Deputy Speaker, let's be clear about this: breach of bail has never existed for youth offenders. The offence those opposite actually introduced in 2014 was an offence better referred to as the act of committing an offence while on bail. It did not reduce breaches of bail by young people. It did nothing to deter or reduce crime. In fact, it just did not work.

The facts are that while in government their policy did not work and judging by this motion they do not even know what they had in place. Further, of the 185 young people who were convicted of the LNP's so-called breach of bail offence, over 90 reoffended within 12 months and 94 reoffended within two years. In Townsville there were fewer than 40 young people convicted of this new offence while it was in effect, with over 90 per cent reoffending within 12 months. I consider that a complete failure.

Courts can already take into account the fact that an offence was committed on bail when sentencing a young person and can provide a harsher punishment. In fact our recent amendment has enshrined this principle in legislation to ensure that courts consider the fact that a young person who commits an offence whilst on bail is an aggravating circumstance in sentencing.

As we have said and as the minister has said, no amount of crime is acceptable and this government makes no apologies for cracking down on this behaviour. Our work in strengthening these laws is not the only way to try to stop reoffending. Investing in programs like Project Booyah, Transition 2 Success and the Clontarf and Stars academies is important as they do change lives. We will back all parts of the system to tackle youth crime throughout the state with well-thought-out ideas, unlike those opposite. I support the amended motion.