




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Youth Justice

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (2.44 pm): Today should be a day of great joy for all Australians and for Queenslanders as the vaccine for COVID-19 is being rolled out. The federal government has secured something in the order of 50 million doses of the vaccine. It is being distributed to the states, and the states, as is right and proper, are distributing it. For the whole state and for Australians we can now see a pathway out of this disease that has changed the way we live, the way we work and the way we come together as a community. It should be a great day of joy for all Queenslanders, but there are those in Queensland, in our cities and in our regions who will not experience that joy—those who have lost loved ones, those who have had their lives immeasurably changed as a result of another threat to their lives and to their livelihoods. Young offenders committing robberies, car thefts and house break-ins threaten lives, threaten jobs and threaten people where they ought to be their safest—in their homes. That threat is becoming a reality far too frequently here in Queensland, with often tragic results for innocent bystanders and everyday Queenslanders.

Our media report diligently on these events and have done so many times over the last few years as community concern has escalated. On several occasions last year I spoke in this place in relation to concerns in my community and more broadly across the community about the government's failure to acknowledge the extent of the problem, of the government's lack of resolve and of their failure to keep the community safe.

We heard today from the minister about Bob Atkinson's June 2018 report. In that report he made four key recommendations, but he said that the youth justice policy must be 'bookended by two fundamental principles—that public safety is paramount and that community confidence is essential'. This government is clearly failing in delivering on those two principles with a tragedy in Alexandra Hills that saw three people lose their lives while out walking and in Townsville where a young woman was killed riding a motorcycle while a vigilante chased young, alleged offenders in a stolen vehicle. Both matters are still before the courts.

In Townsville, where I was less than two weeks ago, the first topic no matter who you spoke to was youth crime. The question is: where are the local members? It seems that two of them are in witness protection and one of them is banned from the precinct, so they are not speaking about it.

In Brisbane, on the Gold Coast and in regional towns and cities the community is calling out for leadership and to be kept safe. In exchange, what they get from this government is platitudes and another knee-jerk reaction, a government that has changed youth justice laws three times in 18 months, member for Toowoomba South—not in five years but in 18 months—not because it cares about community safety but because it was forced to by an outraged community. This is a government with a transport minister who claimed innocent victims 'were in the wrong place at the wrong time' while walking their dogs and a police minister who trivialised serious community concerns by referring to locking people up for stealing a KitKat—as if that was ever a suggestion that was seriously entertained or made by anyone!

This is a government led by a Premier who initially said, 'I want answers from the magistrates', blaming the judiciary for the decisions, and a Deputy Premier who asked why things were not being done or recommendations taken up, blaming agencies and the bureaucracy. This is a government that has systematically weakened youth justice laws and then sought to blame everyone but itself and, in doing so, breaches the primary obligations of a government to keep law-abiding citizens safe.

I listened to the member for Capalaba and the member for Thuringowa. I have no doubt that their regret and sorrow at the loss of life is well meant and well felt. Here is the question they need to answer: why didn't they do something about it before it happened? Why did it take a tragedy for this law to be brought in when the warnings were clear, when the evidence was there, when it was becoming abundantly clear that an accident, that a tragedy, that a crime like this would take lives? Why has it taken these deaths for change to occur?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): The member's time has expired.

Mr NICHOLLS: This is a debate we did not need to have had this government acted in time.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member! Your time has expired.