



Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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MOTION

Youth Crime

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (6.21 pm): I too rise to address the Inspector of Detention Services Bill 2021. I do so as the representative of an electorate that has one of Queensland's largest correctional centres—Woodford Correctional Centre—but also as a former member of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee.

I want to pick up on comments made by the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. I do acknowledge the custodial officers across Queensland and commend them for the fantastic work they do. As I said, Glass House is home to one of Queensland's largest correctional centres—Woodford. Many of the custodial officers who work there reside in the electorate of Glass House. Indeed, I have a number of those custodial officers whom I count as good friends. I know the trials and tribulations they face each day in the workplace. I know what they have to confront each day they go into that environment. I know what they have to confront each day when they come up against some of our state's most vile criminals, to be blunt. Yes, we do need to look at rehabilitation, but sometimes it is actually about ensuring public safety first and foremost, and those custodial officers are very much on the front line when it comes to that.

This afternoon throughout this debate those opposite have been giving history lessons on correctional services and detention services throughout Queensland. I thought I would give a similar history lesson. Let me focus on some of the history of the Palaszczuk Labor government when it comes to detention services. It was the Palaszczuk Labor government that scrapped expansion plans for our correctional centres. We heard the minister just talking about the expansion that is occurring as we speak. That was actually slated to start seven years ago. It was the Palaszczuk Labor government that scrapped it. Had they not, we would not have had the overcrowding issues that we have.

It was the Palaszczuk Labor government that took back into public hands, at the cost of more than \$100 million, privately operated jails in this state. Before those opposite ask who privatised those jails, let me tell the House that it was a former Labor government—it was the Goss Labor government. They took back into public hands privatised jails at an extraordinary cost to taxpayers. Then we saw knee-jerk responses to young people in watch houses. The fact that they were in the watch house in the first place was appalling.

We saw them shift 17-year-olds to youth detention centres without making sure that there were enough beds to house those 17-year-olds and, in some cases, putting some very hardened criminals into contact with some very young children who should never have been exposed to that. It was the same Palaszczuk Labor government that oversaw riots in our youth detention centres and riots in our correctional centres. It was the same Palaszczuk Labor government that has double parked and overcrowded our prisons. It is the same Palaszczuk Labor government that has created a backlog of parole hearings—again, exacerbating that overcrowding. It is the same Palaszczuk Labor government

that, because of all that ineptness, is seeing custodial officers being injured. Before those opposite want to give history lessons on detention services in this state, they need to look at their own track record over the last seven years.

This bill does enact a number of expectations, particularly from the Sofronoff review, of an inspecting service of detention services across the state. As those of us on the committee heard, it probably falls short on some of the expectations. The Queensland Council for Civil Liberties picked up on the role of inspector to be performed by the Ombudsman as enacted by this bill. They said—

Mr Sofronoff clearly intended that the Inspectorate would be separate from the Ombudsman. We suspect this a cost reducing measure and the Committee should seek an assurance that the Ombudsman will be adequately funded to carry out these additional tasks.

Similarly, the Queensland Law Society said—

We consider that the introduction of an Inspector of Detention Services must be accompanied by adequate and ongoing resourcing. To be able to discharge the obligations of the Bill and achieve the policy intent, the inspector will need to be provided sufficient financial resources and staffing.

We heard a number of submitters talk about other models, particularly the Tasmanian model. As a committee, we gave consideration around this aspect of the true independence of the inspector and their resourcing. We took some assurances from the department that the inspector could fulfil the functions set out in the bill, that they would be given the appropriate funds to do so, that they are being established as a separate and functionally independent statutory appointment with distinct functions and powers, and that they will report separately to parliament on their operations and following inspections and reviews.

We felt that it is important that the Ombudsman is adequately resourced to ensure that the role of the independent inspector can be fulfilled effectively by the Ombudsman as contemplated by the bill. We in the opposition will certainly be monitoring this aspect of the operation of this legislation.

There are a number of other key issues raised by submitters. They are contained in report No. 21 of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee. I encourage anyone who has concerns about the implementation or enactment of this legislation to have a read of that report, but we will be allowing the passing of this legislation. We will be monitoring how it is implemented. We look forward to seeing improvements in our detention services.

I raised concerns initially that any issue of injury of custodial officers was not going to be able to be referred to the inspectorate. I do hope that that aspect will be considered in future, that someone independent of the department can consider each of those matters. As we heard from the minister, they are on the front line. They deserve our support. We should be looking at ways that we can protect them better, if not through this bill then through some other means.