




Speech By  
**Brittany Lauga**

**MEMBER FOR KEPPEL**

---

Record of Proceedings, 22 June 2022

**INSPECTOR OF DETENTION SERVICES BILL**

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (4.50 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Inspector of Detention Services Bill 2021. I thank the committee for their work on this bill, particularly the chair, the member for Toohey, and the member for Caloundra, who incorporated his expert knowledge and insight into detention services in Queensland. I also want to acknowledge and thank the member for Cooper for her commitment to social justice in Queensland and the expert work and years of service she has dedicated over time. I also acknowledge all of the submitters to the committee inquiry including the Together union, which represents over 2,600 custodial corrections officers across Queensland, including several hundred around my home in Central Queensland.

While I am on my feet, I acknowledge all of the custodial corrections officers at the Capricornia Correctional Centre and thank them for their work on the front line keeping our community safe and helping to rehabilitate prisoners at Capricornia. The officers at Capricornia recently endured a terrible riot at the centre. It was one of the worst in Queensland's history; 45 prisoners have now been charged. The officers did an amazing job responding to that incident. It was also a great honour and privilege to attend the recent graduation of the latest cohort of custodial corrections officers who have now started work at Capricornia.

The Inspector of Detention Services Bill delivers on the Palaszczuk government's commitment to establish an independent inspectorate over adult correctional facilities, youth detention centres and police watch houses. It creates further oversight into our state's detention facilities to prevent harm and improve detention services. The Inspector of Detention Services will have broad powers to inspect all of these facilities as well as review detention services that are provided at a place of detention. We committed to introduce this role in response to recommendations from a range of independent reviews into the Queensland criminal justice system, including the Sofronoff review, the Taskforce Flaxton report and the independent review of youth detention.

While many of the places of detention have existing accountability and oversight frameworks, there is no one body responsible for the independent oversight of these facilities' operations through a system of regular inspections. The inspector will have the power to conduct both pre-arranged and random inspections of a place of detention and can also review or monitor a detention service at any time. The inspector will also conduct mandatory annual inspections of youth detention centres and undertake inspections of high-security sections of prisons and major watch houses at least once every five years.

Responsibilities of the role also include: preparing and publishing standards in relation to the conduct of inspections; reporting to the Legislative Assembly on inspection outcomes; and recommendations to promote and uphold the humane treatment and conditions of people detained. The position of inspector will be held by the Queensland Ombudsman, who will be supported in the role by the office of the Ombudsman. The inspector's functions do not include investigating incidents such as riots, deaths or escapes or investigating individual complaints. These investigative functions will remain

the responsibility of other bodies such as Queensland Corrective Services, the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, the Queensland Police Service, the Crime and Corruption Commission and the coroner. This bill is yet another demonstration of our commitment to promoting human rights and the safety of corrections officers and prisoners right across the state.

Sadly, a large proportion of prisoners return to prison. Around half of the people who serve a prison sentence will return to prison at least once in their life and many will return several times. In fact, about 50 per cent of all prisoners will return to prison within two years of release. The pattern of repeat offending and growth in prisoner numbers in Queensland have major social and economic implications for everyone, including prisoners, corrections officers, government and the wider community. The cost of recidivism is significant in both the social and financial sense. Of course community safety is paramount and detention is necessary in our society. It is a sad fact of life that we will never completely eradicate crime in our communities, but it is our responsibility as a government to try to reduce and prevent crime in our community. It is better for individuals, families and, importantly, taxpayers.

If you do the crime you do the time, but when you get out we do not want you to go back. Change is necessary to reduce recidivism; however, the problem is complex. Prisoner numbers reflect underlying forces, including long-term social and economic factors and community views about criminal justice. They also reflect the daily activities and decisions at key points within the criminal justice system, sentencing and legislative frameworks, police resourcing and decisions, sentencing practices, court workloads and access to support services, including Legal Aid. We know from all of the international evidence that the quality of the prison environment is a significant determinant of prisons' impact on reoffending.

The reasons prisoners return to jail are complex but they may include things such as: the prison experience not providing a deterrent effect to future offending; difficulty finding employment—in fact, less than 16 per cent of prisoners have organised paid employment two weeks after release—a lack of financial resources; an untreated or ongoing drug problem or mental health issue; homelessness—in Queensland, sadly around 39 per cent of prison entrants in 2015 were homeless in the four weeks prior to imprisonment, and 47 per cent of dischargees either did not know where they would stay or were expecting to stay in short-term or emergency accommodation on release—a lack of family support on release; and inadequate personal identification, resulting in delays accessing welfare benefits and other services. All of the evidence shows that by providing safe prisons with a focus on quality rehabilitation and reintegration we can reduce recidivism and in turn reduce the impact of crime on our communities and the cost to taxpayers.

The Palaszczuk Labor government is committed to the public operation of prisons in Queensland. This is in stark contrast to those opposite, who wanted to privatise Queensland's prisons when they were in government. They sacked 15 staff from the Maryborough centre; Darling Downs was closed and more than 40 full-time staff were sacked. I am proud that this Palaszczuk Labor government is committed to public prisons. I am proud that in 2019 we committed to take back control of Queensland's two privately operated prisons following the CCC's Taskforce Flaxton report from 2018. The report found that at Queensland's two privately operated prisons there was evidence prisoners were not treated humanely due to overcrowding, which was causing an increase in prisoners assaulting corrections staff.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Krause): Order, members on my left! I cannot hear the member for Keppel. If you had a point of order I would not be able to rule on it, so please afford the member the courtesy that you would expect if you were on your feet.

**Ms LAUGA:** We know that publicly operated correctional facilities have a far superior staff-to-prisoner ratio. This means not only elevated safety levels for staff and prisoners; it also greatly enhances the capacity to provide the appropriate rehabilitation programs to support breaking the cycle of offending.

I am proud that the Palaszczuk government is delivering a record corrections budget which includes measures to support community safety outcomes across Queensland as well as a number of important additions to enhance the outstanding work of custodial officers, Community Corrections officers and QCS staff more broadly. The investments in safety and security by the Palaszczuk government in this budget are another way we are delivering better services to make the Queensland community, our officers and staff safer.

The security and safety of correctional centres and custodial officers will be improved across Queensland, with a collective investment of more than \$230 million over four years to improve electronic security systems and for maintenance and minor works. This includes funding to further boost custodial

officer safety through the installation of safety hatches in older style cell doors and the purchase of additional body worn cameras for staff. This bill delivers on the Palaszcuk government's commitment to establish an independent inspectorate that will provide further oversight into our state's detention facilities to prevent harm and improve detention services. I commend the bill to the House.