




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR HILL

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CRIMINAL LAW (RAISING THE AGE OF RESPONSIBILITY) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (6.21 pm): I rise to give my contribution to the Criminal Law (Raising the Age of Responsibility) Amendment Bill 2021. In short, the main aim of the bill is to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years of age where a person under the age of 14 is not criminally responsible for any act or omission. Further to this, no procedures or punishment would take place if a person under the age of 14 were to commit a crime or act and police would not be able to hold or arrest anyone under the age of 14.

I do not support the passing of this bill. In fact, it is misguided that we are even debating this as it is a clear slap in the face to all Queenslanders, particularly those who are a victim of youth crime. I point out that for every crime there is a victim. It is alarming how this issue is politicised and the innocent victims of youth crime are constantly forgotten. Anyone who believes that youth who commit these crimes are innocent are living in an illusion. They know right from wrong and know exactly what their rights are under the law and the law is that you can get away with anything.

Based on the Queensland Childrens Court data cities that are under siege, many of these in North Queensland, have experienced a massive increase in theft related and violent crimes at the hands of young offenders under this state government. Youth theft related charges rose from 6,579 in 2014-15 to 12,903 in 2020-21, almost double. Break-in charges rose from 4,251 to 8,236 in the same period while robbery and extortion related crimes increased from 256 to 895. That has tripled. State government data also shows youth are becoming more violent with the number of acts intended to cause harm charges rising from 1,353 to 2,397. It is beyond belief that we are debating this bill that will effectively give youth a free pass. It would send a clear signal that they can get away with anything.

I guarantee that those figures I have just quoted would be nothing compared to what would follow if this bill were passed. If these kids are breaking the law now and the age of criminal responsibility is 10 years old, imagine how brilliant they would be by the time they reach 14. Rather than giving these youth a 'get out of jail free' card with a pat on the back, there needs to be penalties that actually deter youth from committing crime.

The state government's punishment regime is a dismal failure, so what hope would the Greens' grand plan of sending the child home with a good talking to and a warm cup of hot chocolate be after they have just taken out a whole neighbourhood? Even the Queensland Police Union have rejected this bill, and for very good reasons. Many of the support services implied by the Greens to be an alternative to holding an offender are simply non-existent in rural and regional Queensland. Often the only service available in rural and regional Queensland is the police. Police are not trained as social workers; they are there to uphold the law. Not only is this bill a kick in the teeth for the victims of youth crime around the state, it is also a slap in the face for all the men and women of the Queensland Police Service. This bill clearly does not meet community expectations on curbing youth crime other than satisfying the social conscience of a few—until their car is stolen and burnt.

Youth crime is a huge issue in North Queensland and we do not need to go softer on repeat offenders. Local police in most regional areas plagued by youth crime will tell honourable members that the majority of crimes are committed by a core group of repeat offenders. KAP's relocation sentencing policy should be seen as a real alternative to bringing this crime crisis to an end. Under our policy, youth repeat offenders would be given the opportunity to be reformed through hard work, discipline and skills building at remote properties. They would be given the opportunity to have a life and a purpose, not just to aspire to be the best criminal they can be by the time they reach 14.

Currently, the courts have two options. One is to lock them up, and then they come back out as professional criminals. The other is to release them, and then they go back out there and commit the same crimes. It is no good sending them to Cleveland Youth Detention Centre because that is a badge of honour for them. They get free boots and a good feed, which costs up to \$1,500 a day. Relocation sentencing would give magistrates the power to send them to remote area locations where they could be taught values and skills such as droving and how to build cattle yards and cattle troughs along with other proven workable programs. I completely oppose this bill.