




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (4.20 pm): I have been looking forward to speaking in support of the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023. Members opposite will know why shortly. We need to draw a line in the sand for those serious violent offenders who need to be held to account. That is what people in my community have said to me. I have been resolute in standing up and fighting for change in the right area by working together, as we will in this parliament.

Mr Mander interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): Pause the clock. Member for Everton, I have spoken to you three times since taking the chair. The next time it will be to give you a warning.

Mr HARPER: I want to thank those victims of crime who came before me and shared their experiences.

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Mr HARPER: I take the member for Nanango's interjection. Suddenly they have forgotten what happened before 2015 and before Labor came to government. Let me give members a history lesson. In 2012, 2013 and 2014, those opposite hid the crime statistics by closing the statistician's office. That is typical of the LNP. They had a failed boot camp, with 70 per cent of participants reoffending. Worst of all, they cut funding for Project Booyah. As recently as Friday the *Courier-Mail* talked about the money we have invested and the change we have created by backing in that program.

Community safety is absolutely paramount. I want to talk about two elements of this bill. The first is breach of bail. We need the Leader of the Opposition to admit that under the Newman government it was an offence to have an offence. There was no change. Every single one of them reoffended. It is because of the advocacy of members like me and other regional members, who went to the Premier, the youth justice minister, the police minister and the Attorney-General, that we have change. I thank the Premier for that, because community safety remains paramount in my mind. The breach of bail provisions that we are putting in have teeth. If people offend, they will be put in custody.

The second element is the serious repeat offender declaration. I need to go through this. Clause 21 of the bill proposes that the court may declare a child a serious repeat offender if the court is sentencing the child in relation to prescribed indictable offence; the child has previously been sentenced on at least one occasion to a detention order for a described indictable offence; a pre-sentence report has been received; or the court is satisfied that there is a high probability that the child would commit a further prescribed offence. If such a declaration is made, the court must still consider the sentencing principles and must have primary regard to the need to protect members of the community; the nature and extent of violence, if any, used in the commission of the offence; the extent of any disregard by the child in the commission of the offence for the interests of public safety; and the impact of the offence on public safety.

This completely discounts the opposition's rubbish in its statement of reservation and in the contributions we have heard about removing youth detention as a last resort. The courts now must have primary regard before sentencing to everything I have just articulated.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr HARPER: They will have primary regard because it is now in the legislative framework. I believe that this bill builds upon the presumption against bail that we brought in last year. It builds upon serious offenders not getting bail that was brought in in 2019 or 2020. As a parliament, now is the time to work together to make positive change in our community.

We just heard the hypocrisy of those opposite. They talked about early intervention, but we know that they cut programs. Here is what we have done in Townsville. I have advocated long and hard for this. We had 400 people in 2016 at a crime rally. We got \$7.4 million back for Project Booyah. We have the Stars Foundation, Silver Lining, Clontarf, the Stronger Communities Early Action Group, the Street University—I am very happy to have got funding for that—and the On Country program. While I am trying to work with my community, I have to put up with this rubbish. The member for Burdekin and the federal member for Herbert have been complicit in dividing our community with hate speech and racial discrimination. I table an article from 10 June 2022 by the ABC titled 'Townsville residents refuse efforts to break cycle for troubled young people'.

Tabled paper: Document, dated 10 June 2022, titled 'Townsville residents refuse efforts to break cycle for troubled young people' [294](#).

Who was there? The member for Burdekin was out the front with the federal member for Herbert wearing a blue shirt, along with the other LNP members. Their actions are politically motivated and designed to divide our community with fear and hatred. Those members should hang their heads in shame. This is a time to work together as a parliament to make our community safer. Those members should hang their heads in shame and apologise to the people of Townsville for the political hatred.

Tabled paper: Photograph, dated 2022, depicting a crime rally [295](#).

I will share something with the House that I cannot forget. I went to one of those Take Back Townsville 'you have to wear a blue shirt' rallies. The language I heard I cannot repeat in this House. There were some 50-odd LNP members there. The journalists refused to report what they saw. It was purely designed to divide our community with hate speech and racial discrimination. I say to those members: you can keep going low—just like the Leader of the Opposition did this morning when he personally attacked me—but I will rise above and continue to fight for my community and advocate to make sure that we get a safer community through the elements of this bill.

I support this bill. I thank the committee that travelled throughout Queensland, visited Townsville and listened. They have done a good job. I thank those ministers who backed us in. This bill was needed to make change. We will not have a legacy of failure, like the LNP does. We are working hard to make change in our communities. I commend the bill to the House.