




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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CHILD PROTECTION (OFFENDER REPORTING AND OFFENDER PROHIBITION ORDER) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (4.55 pm): I rise to speak in support of the bill introduced by the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services. On the back of the contribution from the member for Buderim I acknowledge Bruce and Denise Morcombe as well. I think the Child Protection (Offender Reporting and Offender Prohibition Order) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is entirely appropriate to protect young people in Queensland. I do want to move to the amendments which I support in full, particularly the youth justice amendment.

As a result of our laws, serious young offenders are in custody for longer periods of time and this is impacting youth detention capacity. In response, the government will complement existing capacity with new detention centre infrastructure to be established at Woodford and Cairns which will come online in 2026. It would be entirely irresponsible not to have any interim contingencies in place for the three years between now and when the new infrastructure becomes available. As a local member, I continue to make representations to the ministers about alternative approaches of detaining young people and ensuring they have responsive rehabilitation programs to get them back on track into education, skills or training.

These amendments will clarify the administrative arrangements—that is all—for holding young people in police watch houses until capacity becomes available in youth detention centres. In her contribution the member for Macalister articulated very appropriately the process of what happens within a watch house. I want to commend the member for Cooper for her contribution. I agree with her contribution and the way she articulated the very violent crimes—that is what I am concerned about in my community—that are being committed in Queensland affecting people in our communities. It needs to be addressed. There is only one place that serious violent repeat offenders belong, and that is in custody.

I heard the contribution from the member for Maiwar. It might not be ideal, but I say to the Greens party and the member for Maiwar, 'Take off your rose-coloured glasses,' because there are serious crimes happening in our communities. I know what their overarching policy is: they would not want a youth justice detention centre; they would let them all free. That is not in step with the reality of what is happening in my electorate. The people of Thuringowa have had a gutful of violent serious offenders. They want them to be held responsible and put in custody. They really could not give one iota about where they are as long as they are off the streets and our community is safe. But is it the best place? I have been in many watch houses and I have treated many young people in watch houses. I have taken young people to mortuaries. With morgue attendants I have had to clean up young murdered people and put them in a state where their families can come and view them. It might not be ideal to have people in a watch house but, as the member for Cooper articulated very well in her contribution, I would rather that than be in a morgue. I draw many comparisons to the member for Cooper.

The LNP members were smiling and gesticulating with the Greens member yesterday thinking it was all fun, but they do not actually have a position. They say they want to stand up with victims, but they will not back the laws to actually hold criminals to account. All we see is spin and lines from the LNP. All words, no substance. All front, like an empty—

Mr STEVENS: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member used unparliamentary language. He knows that. I ask him to withdraw.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): I will take some advice. Member for Thuringowa, I did not hear the language which the member for Mermaid Beach is referring to. However, it would assist the House if you were happy to withdraw.

Mr HARPER: Sure, I withdraw.

Ms GRACE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I do not think there was any direct personal reflections given. They were general—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, the question was not one of offence; it was of unparliamentary language. I have made my ruling.

Ms GRACE: I guess I am seeking clarification about whether it was a personal reflection or just general unparliamentary language.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have made my ruling.

Mr HARPER: The LNP do not have a clear policy when it comes to this. It is just words. I do not know what 'gold standard' programs mean. There is no definition of it. There is nothing that actually says what that means in terms of their spin. Where is the detail in what the opposition are saying when it comes to this? I echo what the Premier said yesterday: if we are going to take this seriously we all need to be on board and work together to make our community safer. Like I said, my constituents want a safe community. If those opposite are serious, they should join us in making sure our community is safe.

I go back to these amendments which will allow youth detention centres to be established at a police watch house or part of a corrective services facility. I appreciate the concerns regarding the Human Rights Act being overridden to allow these provisions, but I say: what about victims' rights? There has to be a balance here. I will stand up every day and represent my constituents in Thuringowa and the victims of crime I have met, who just want a safe community. I say to the opposition: be genuine, not disingenuous, when it comes to policy and work together with the government, because we know that when we all work together we achieve more in this state.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to the welfare of young people in custody and detention centre staff, and these amendments are necessary while we continue to improve Queensland's youth detention system. I note the opposition have complained about the swiftness in which these amendments have been introduced, but I also note that the member for Burdekin, the shadow minister for police—and I am glad he is in the House—declared yesterday that we are all in the middle of a youth crime crisis and three hours later complained that the government was urgently responding to this very issue. That is a bit of an interesting oxymoron. The opposition have had ample opportunity to provide—

Mr Last interjected.

Mr HARPER: I will take the interjection. The LNP have had plenty of time and opportunity to provide alternative policies to those progressed by this government, but they are light on alternative policies. They still have not provided those policies and it has been over 900 days. We are still waiting. They are all spin, no substance, all talk and no detail. They have absolutely no plan and no leadership when it comes to addressing crime in this state. They just want to politicise it. The LNP only want to politicise the problem. They do not have a real serious policy. What are the 'gold standard' programs? What does that mean? What is the other one—I cannot remember?

Ms Pease: Pruning.

Mr HARPER: Pruning programs.

Mrs Gilbert: Unshackle.

Mr HARPER: Yes, unshackling the judiciary.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Lytton will not interject from a seat other than her own.

Mr HARPER: My one wish before Christmas is for the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Attorney-General or any of them with any legal background to stand up and define what 'unshackling the judiciary' actually means. It is just another line with no substance. It does not actually achieve anything. It does not actually mean anything.

What we are asking the judiciary to do is to sentence appropriately. My final call would be to the judiciary. We passed laws in this place, which the LNP supported, around declaration of a serious repeat offender. I say to the courts: make sure you apply those laws and that sentencing meets community expectations. That is what my electorate wants; that is what I want. We all want a safe community. I am completely sick and tired of the political lightweights who sit on that side who just come up with spin. It is lightweight, it is hopeless, it is ineffective and it does not help the situation that we are confronted with today.

We come up with real policies. We are investing in youth detention centres. We are investing in more police. We are investing in programs to break the cycle of crime, like the Street University in Townsville and Project Booyah, which that lot actually cut under the Newman government. Let us be real about who is actually wanting to make change in this place. There is a genuine side in this, and it is the Labor government with the police minister, and I applaud the police minister for everything he has put into this to address the serious issue because he has been behind this the whole way. What do we see from those opposite? Heads down, no policy, 900 days of promises with nothing delivered, just spin and no substance. I commend the bill to the House.