



Speech By  
**Ann Leahy**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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### **STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL**

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (6.20 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023. Firstly we need to ask why we are here having this debate. It was the Palaszczuk Labor government that watered down the youth justice laws because being soft on crime is in Labor's DNA. In 2015 the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill removed breach of bail as an offence for children, reinstated the principle that detention orders should be imposed only as a last resort for the shortest appropriate period when sentencing a child, and reinstated into the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 that the principle of imprisonment is a sentence of last resort and a sentence that allows the offender to stay in the community is preferable, and look what happened. We now have a generation of youth offenders stealing cars, breaking into homes, stealing and assaulting victims and police. We now have a generation of youth offenders who do not know what consequences are for their actions all because this Labor government watered down the youth justice laws.

Despite the LNP calling for years for the return of breach of bail, Labor minister after minister lined up to say, 'They don't need that. It wouldn't work.' The tourism minister was saying exactly that the day before the government backflipped on opposing breach of bail. The Labor government is out of touch with victims and Labor's crime crisis and out of touch with what Queenslanders expect. Queenslanders expect us to pass laws that are required to keep our communities safe. There is not a better example of this out-of-touch behaviour than the Labor member for Mansfield. In 2019 when speaking on the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, the member said in this House—

... the bill aims to reduce the reoffending rates of young offenders ...

Well, we all know that that is not the case, and I am sure the victims of crime are wondering why the member for Mansfield had so much faith in the 2015 youth justice bill to change and to reduce reoffending. The member for Mansfield went on in that debate to suggest—

... onerous bail conditions are likely to be counterproductive ...

She also said—

... I have seen young people who have committed a crime and then breached their bail conditions end up in far worse trouble than they had originally been in.

So they should be. The Labor member is out of touch with the community that she claims to represent and it is time for those members opposite to support consequences for actions and be on the side of the victims, not the criminals.

The LNP supports the Strengthening Community Safety Bill. The bill is not perfect. However, the LNP will not stand in its way. The bill could be significantly improved if the Labor government would accept the member for Burdekin's amendments to remove detention as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate time. What Queenslanders find most disappointing is the way the Premier has misled them on her 10-point plan. Her 10-point plan just after Christmas promised that 'violent juvenile car thieves will face 14 years jail in a suite of increased penalties aimed squarely at keeping the community safe'.

What we know from the backdown by the Premier and her ministers is that the promise cannot override section 175 of the Youth Justice Act. The Youth Justice Act constrains magistrates and judges in sentencing juvenile criminals. The maximum sentences that courts will be able to impose is half what the Premier promised. The Premier misled Queenslanders in her 10-point plan and her untruthfulness has now been exposed. The Premier has not kept Queenslanders safe and her 10-point plan has been exposed as a sham.

After two years of campaigning, the LNP has had a win with the battle against youth crime. The government has agreed on our push for a breach of bail to be an offence for young offenders. In 2021 the LNP tried to move amendments to make breach of bail an offence within the Youth Justice Act. The government has copied our proposal word for word. It is a clear acknowledgement from the Palaszczuk Labor government that its decision to water down youth justice laws has created the crime crisis. From an LNP perspective, this is the first of many changes we are campaigning for.

The current youth justice system is failing at both ends of the spectrum. Removing the rule of detention as a last resort in sentencing as outlined by the member for Burdekin would have allowed judges to freely assess the most appropriate sentence for a youth offender. Given the government has spent around a billion dollars on youth justice, there is a need for an independent audit of early intervention programs, especially when we hear from advocacy groups these sobering statistics about repeat youth offenders: 60 per cent had experienced or been impacted by domestic or family violence, 46 per cent had had mental health or behavioural disorders and 38 per cent had used ice or methamphetamines. We must also get serious about early intervention services to help guide these young people back on to the rails before it is too late.

Getting serious about changing the law and having early intervention outcomes that are successful will help drive down the cost of living. I will expand on the cost to the community which I live in from juvenile crime. In Roma I have had a long list of businesses that have experienced break-ins. Roma is not the only community that experiences these problems; I see it in Dalby, I see it in St George, I see it in other communities that are experiencing a crime crisis. We have rural crime as well, something that often goes unnoticed because written-off cars have an impact in the media and on social media whereas missing drums of diesel or cut fences or destroyed tradesmen's tools do not have the same visual impact.

In Roma we have businesses that are boarded up because there is a shortage of glass in the town to replace the broken windows. Mechanic businesses have told me that it has cost them \$30,000 since Christmas last year from the break and enters that have occurred, convenience stores have lost up to \$40,000 worth of cigarettes from break and enters and some shop owners in the town that I live in now sleep at their business because they are so sick and tired of the break-ins and they are trying to deter the offenders. Retail businesses have had glass breakage to the tune of \$15,000. Sporting clubs have had over \$10,000 damage to equipment and their premises. Some have been broken into five times since Christmas last year. They are sick of this. Guests have had their cars stolen from outside motels. It is estimated that over 50 cars have been stolen in Roma in the last six months. Education Queensland had to employ a 24-hour security guard to guard the staff cars in Roma because of concerns about theft of vehicles.

This is all costing residents dearly, with increased insurance premiums. It is increasing our cost of living. The victims of crime are everywhere in my electorate. We are not immune to the impacts of the Labor government's weak youth justice laws that have failed our communities. Queenslanders deserve better than a Labor government that is extremely slow to act when it comes to the victims of crime and when crime is hurting in these communities.