




Speech By
Barry O'Rourke

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Record of Proceedings, 14 March 2023

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (5.17 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023. Queensland has amongst the toughest youth justice laws in the nation and this bill will make those laws even tougher. We know that a lack of resources and a lack of opportunity are primary causes of youth crime. Families who are stretched economically and who are facing housing insecurity, job insecurity and limited opportunities for children to join extracurricular activities speak to me about the challenges they face in keeping their children engaged in school and away from negative influences. Many of these serious repeat offenders have sadly grown up in homes that have not always been safe and secure. Many have grown up in homes exposed to violence, abuse, neglect and social exclusion. Not only does this exposure socialise young people to think they are unlovable or that violence is okay; we also know it impacts on their neurological development, often leading to more impulsive and greater risk-taking.

The presence of drugs and alcohol in the lives of young people continues to concern me as a father and as a community representative and advocate. Substance abuse can impair judgement, increase aggression and lead to criminal behaviour both for adults but particularly for young people who are already so impressionable. At a time in their lives when young people are already feeling pressured and at times confused, the presence of alcohol and drugs can contribute towards antisocial behaviours.

It is not uncommon for young offenders to present in custody with addiction issues. There is no quick fix for youth crime. That is why the government is delivering an additional investment package of more than \$332 million, building on the \$800 million already invested in youth justice, to ensure that programs that work at diverting young people away from crime will continue and expand.

In Rockhampton we have the youth co-responder teams, which are working well and assisting youth before they get into trouble. Everything that we do in this area of youth justice is focused on enhancing community safety and reducing and preventing youth crime. Rather than waiting for young people to offend, the co-responder program is working to stop crime and antisocial behaviour from happening in the first place. A key part of the team's work has been to connect young people who are at risk of offending to services that can help turn their lives around. The team works on issues such as education, domestic violence, housing and health so they can intervene early and deal with the underlying causes of crime. They also play an important role in checking that young people are complying with their bail conditions.

In addition, co-responders have made contact with families, community agencies and other stakeholders hundreds of times in relation to young people. We have a bike shed in Rockhampton city which offers a program for young people that is centred around the repair and restoration of bikes. It offers young people an opportunity to talk about the issues they are experiencing while they refurbish bikes for people in need. We have had Project Booyah running for a number of years now. This youth mentoring program is targeted to young people aged 14 to 17 years to help them make better choices.

We also have Transition 2 Success, which aims to prevent at-risk young people from entering the criminal justice system and reducing reoffending among young people. There are another 14 programs delivered in the Rockhampton area that are providing support or intervention programs for youth and their families. I believe that this bill not only addresses youth crime, particularly recidivist offenders, but also provides support services to assist our youth to make better choices. I commend the bill to the House.