




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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### **STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL**

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (4.44 pm): I rise to address the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023. Queenslanders were demanding, and needed, Premier Palaszczuk to recall parliament in January to deal with our state's youth crime crisis, but as is always the case under Labor there are delays and inertia. Now Queenslanders have learned that the Labor Premier will not even deliver the laws that were promised, with revelations that the maximum penalties that can be applied will only be half of what was initially presented by the Premier.

Elected members of the Queensland parliament are debating this legislation for two key reasons: firstly, the failure of real leadership from the Palaszczuk state Labor government; and secondly, because of the comprehensive failure of the Palaszczuk state Labor government's current legislation and associated policy framework. Queensland is in the midst of a youth crime crisis that started from the moment the Palaszczuk state Labor government was elected eight years ago.

It is the primary responsibility of any elected government to ensure the safety and protection of its citizens. This means providing a safe and secure environment in which people can live, work and raise their families. A government that fails to protect its citizens is one that is failing in its most fundamental duty. Labor has absolutely failed Queenslanders on this issue. It is without question that Queensland residents feel less safe now than they did eight years ago when the Palaszczuk state Labor government was first elected in 2015.

It is now common occurrence for Queenslanders to experience—to see via the news, to hear on radio, to read in local newspapers and to discover through various social media platforms—the reality of Labor's daily youth crime crisis. This is a crisis that has been engulfing various communities right across Queensland. Local residents in my electorate of Moggill and Queenslanders right across our state are having conversations and taking actions that just eight years ago seemed unimaginable. Families are now having to discuss and plan for what they would do in the event their home is broken into or if a family member is violently attacked. Sadly, we have seen these occurrences occur in a number of communities across Queensland. Businesses are having to invest more dollars every year in additional security and monitoring, such is the fear and lived experience as a consequence of break-ins and robberies.

I have met with many Queenslanders and local residents who have been victims of such crime. In fact, I recently met with a local resident of Kenmore Hills who shared with me their recent lived experience of two robberies within two months. At the time, I promised this resident I would share their experience in the Queensland parliament to highlight the dire situation that is currently gripping communities across our state. As the local resident told me—

We've lived in this neighbourhood for 43 years and never had a problem with security until recently. It appears that these types of situations are increasing at a rapid rate, and from what we can gather the state government urgently needs to put a stop to this nonsense in the community by changing their laws and legislation. From these two experiences of home robberies we and our neighbours have been left feeling vulnerable, disturbed, uneasy, and we are all being forced to increase our security situation.

Queenslanders should be under no illusion. This is a crisis of epidemic proportions, yet from the Premier to her ministers and all members of the Labor state government, none of them can bring themselves to call this what is truly is: a Queensland youth crime crisis—one that is in fact Labor’s youth crime crisis. Denial has been at the very heart of Labor’s response to tackling crime in Queensland and delivering improved outcomes for those who come into contact with Queensland’s youth justice system.

Yet again, as we saw at the end of last year, after first denying that any such youth crime problem existed—and, in fact, after defending the strength of the laws and measures already in place—the Labor state government rushed out yet another multipoint plan with the promise that it would be ‘making tougher laws even tougher’. Since weakening Queensland’s youth justice laws in 2015—eight years ago—the state Labor government has announced a five-point plan in 2016, a four-point plan in 2019, a five-point plan in 2020 and 10-point plan in 2022. These plans have all been failures—some 24 points and counting—yet Labor still cannot bring itself to admit it has failed.

What is worse is the fact that the Palaszczuk state Labor government has completely lost sight of what it means to deliver a comprehensive justice system here in Queensland. This should not be about making tough laws tougher or making announcements with more millions of dollars attached to them. A youth justice system that is fair, efficient and effective is essential for maintaining social order and reducing crime, and this has to be the focus and standard of delivery of the Palaszczuk state Labor government. Queenslanders have had enough of the kneejerk, short-term political fixes that the Labor state government announces time and again rather than implementing the measures and reforms that will make a genuine and meaningful difference.

The Queensland Liberal National Party state opposition has consistently called for offenders, no matter their age, to be held to account for their actions. A modern and just society demands nothing less; however, quite simply the Palaszczuk state Labor government’s approach has not adequately held juvenile offenders to account.

The Liberal National Party has listened to residents of communities across Queensland as well as stakeholders, all of whom have had a direct connection to offenders and their victims and know what it takes to combat this youth crime crisis. The first step in addressing juvenile crime has to be to restore the offence of breach of bail. This offence was removed by the current state Labor government, and finally Labor have had to admit that they got it wrong. Bail is a privilege, not a right, and any breach of an offender’s bail conditions is a breach of trust, not just with our justice system but with the community. There must be consequences for such a breach. This is about upholding the values of our society. With rights also comes mandatory responsibilities. The state Labor government must lead by example and reinforce the ideal that actions do have consequences.

The Liberal National Party also supports the implementation of meaningful early intervention and other services to support offenders when they are released from custody and/or detention. A modern justice system is not just about punishment; it is also about delivering early intervention, rehabilitation and support. A modern justice system is one which helps young offenders turn their lives around, reducing the likelihood of reoffending and helping them to become productive members of our society.

It is the current state Labor government’s legacy that, according to the Productivity Commission, Queensland leads the nation for child detention and repeat youth offenders. It is nothing less than a systemic failure when more than half of all youth offenders released from supervision are resentenced for new offences within a year of their release. It is time for the Palaszczuk state Labor government to listen and adopt a holistic, thoroughly evidence-based approach to reforming its failed youth justice system.

As the Liberal National Party shadow minister for education, I know that education and training has a significant and measurable impact not only on preventing young Queenslanders from entering our youth justice system but on rehabilitating young offenders as well. There are legitimate questions as to whether the state Labor government understands this. This was emphasised recently in an open letter to the Queensland parliament, signed by a number of peak bodies and esteemed experts, which stated—

By the time children enter detention, over 50% have not been attending school... Non-attendance at schools and high rates of suspensions and exclusions are frequent precursors to children’s involvement with the youth justice system.

The Department of Education’s latest annual report reveals that school attendance rates have declined across all regions in Queensland during the last five years. This decline is even more pronounced amongst Queensland’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It was shown in a 2021 research brief prepared by the Queensland Treasury that 40 per cent of youth offenders under youth justice supervision were ‘totally disengaged from education, vocational training and employment

programs'. I would like to acknowledge and endorse the comments made this week by the highly respected retired magistrate Alan Yorkston, who has stated that the key to addressing the increase in juvenile crime is through education.

Queenslanders have been asking these questions. What is the Labor minister for education's plan? Where are the dedicated strategies, evidence-based programs and measurable targets to keep Queensland students engaged with education and to increase school attendance rates? There is no doubt that Queenslanders deserve answers to these questions.

In concluding my contribution today, I would also like to thank and acknowledge the incredible dedication and tireless work of all who are involved in our youth justice system. It is incredibly hard, challenging and difficult work. I acknowledge local Queensland Police Service officers, frontline health workers, youth support officers and educators to name just a few. It is time that the Palaszczuk state Labor government accepts responsibility for its own failings and delivers meaningful and comprehensive evidence-based reforms to our youth justice system which are responsive to the needs of our communities. There is no doubt that the issues affecting victims of crime must be addressed. We need to have a youth justice system that works for all here in Queensland. We deserve that for all of our communities across Queensland.