




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 11 May 2023

MONITORING OF PLACES OF DETENTION (OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE) BILL

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.17 pm): I rise to contribute to the Monitoring of Places of Detention (Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture) Bill 2022. Previous speakers on this side of the House have spoken of the importance of ensuring that offenders receive appropriate punishment whilst being treated humanely. I note that unrestricted access to all places of detention is a fundamental component of this particular bill.

Speakers on this side of the House have also spoken about the importance of honouring commitments made at a national level and this government's record when it comes to detention. In recent days, we have seen yet another example where a member of the judiciary has expressed concerns regarding the operation of our youth detention centres.

During my brief contribution I want to highlight another failing when it comes to detention and, sadly, it is a failing that has been raised before and, like many others, is one that rests at the feet of this current government. I refer of course to the men and women who, every day, serve our community through their work in these centres. Whether they work in our prisons, community correctional centres, work camps, youth detention centres or police watch houses, these staff play a key role in keeping our communities safe.

Just like we saw in the Inspector of Detention Services Bill, the safety and rights of these workers has come under scrutiny in recent months. While the rights of the person being detained is pushed to the forefront, we should not lose sight of the fact that we have workers in these centres being seriously assaulted and in some cases left with lifelong injuries.

The committee process itself made several references to staff shortages in detention centres. However, despite these concerns being raised year after year, this government has been very slow to act. Nothing highlighted this government's ignorance of the staff shortages in detention centres more than the admission that only an additional nine staff were funded in last year's budget and that none of them were for custodial corrections officer positions.

WorkCover data shows that more staff in centres of detention are being injured and that they are off work for longer due to the severity of their injuries—but still we are talking about the rights of the offender. A quick look through the budget documents shows that for years now we have seen centres in Queensland overcrowded because there has been a lack of planning. You have to wonder why this planning has not happened when many of these issues have been raised directly with the relevant minister and even by witnesses to parliamentary committees.

For example, the Inspector of Detention Services Bill was passed in August last year. Back in November 2021 during the committee process for that legislation there were concerns raised about the matters covered under this bill. Michael Thomas of Together Queensland said that the Optional Protocol

to the Convention Against Torture was the lowest common denominator and raised several issues relating to staff safety and how addressing those issues would also be beneficial for people in detention and the wider community. He spoke of toxic chemicals being used in industry workshops. He spoke of prisoners having access to picks and hedging equipment during a riot as well as petrol that was used to make Molotov cocktails. He spoke about a lack of body scanners which would help address the introduction of drugs into correctional facilities. Importantly, he also said that addressing issues like these would help prisoners 'to engage in activity that is likely to benefit them'.

It is a sad fact that today prison-made weapons are still being found in Queensland correctional centres. Across the Ditch in New Zealand correctional officers have been provided with stab-resistant vests since 2015. Eight years later here in Queensland staff do not have access to stab-resistant vests in our correctional centres. Queenslanders would be right to ask if we need to see some sort of horrific event take place before this government acts, just like we have seen in the youth justice space.

I will not be opposing this bill because the overwhelming majority of men and women who work in these centres also recognise the importance of ensuring offenders receive appropriate punishment whilst being treated humanely. I call on this government to treat those staff with the respect they deserve and to address these issues as a matter of urgency. It is the least they deserve.