




Speech By
Hon. Di Farmer
MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

Record of Proceedings, 23 August 2023

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

 **Hon. DE FARMER** (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Small Business, Minister for Training and Skills Development and Minister for Youth Justice) (4.16 pm): I rise to speak briefly to the Child Protection (Offender Reporting and Offender Prohibition Order) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The Palaszczuk government has a plan to address youth crime. We have invested heavily in community safety, we are targeting serious repeat offenders, we are tackling the complex causes of youth crime and we are giving a voice to victims. Our new strong laws allow the courts to declare high-risk offenders as serious repeat offenders. They are some of the toughest laws in the country and they mean that serious repeat offenders can be sentenced for longer periods to protect community safety. Longer time in detention also allows for more intensive rehabilitation to help tackle the complex causes of youth crime. The fact that the courts have already made 28 declarations shows that those stronger laws are starting to work.

A recent Supreme Court matter highlighted an error in the orders being made for young people going into detention and raised the need to validate and clarify 30 years of custom and practice that Queensland has used to hold young people in watch houses. We are committed to ensuring that young people charged with a crime should spend the least amount of time possible in a watch house. However, in circumstances where they are waiting for a court appearance or waiting for a place in a youth detention centre it is necessary to keep some young people in a watch house for their safety, the safety of our staff and the safety of the community. We do not take these decisions lightly. The chief executive must consider factors including the duties of the chief executive and commissioner as employers, as well as the needs of the young people including their age, sex, cultural background and physical and mental health, and my department has considered multiple other options.

A human rights override declaration applies to this decision-making process until 31 December 2026 or until new purpose-built detention infrastructure is operational in Woodford and Cairns in 2026. A human rights override declaration will also be made to allow a youth detention centre to be established at a police watch house or part of a corrective services facility, though this provision is only intended to be used in extraordinary circumstances. Young people who offend will be held accountable. We are building two new therapeutic youth detention centres at Woodford and Cairns, to be operational, as I said, by 2026 to further increase capacity. We have introduced strong youth justice laws to keep the community safe at the same time that we are investing an additional \$100 million in early intervention and prevention programs to break the cycle of youth crime.

Demand for youth detention beds in Queensland has exceeded built and safe capacity for some months. It is probable that demand for beds outstrips supply for two key reasons: the average daily number of serious repeat offenders is continuing to increase—for the 12 months ending 31 May 2023 the average number was 452, compared to 374 for the year ending 31 May 2022; and we are seeing offending density increase over time—that is, each young person is committing more offences, leading

to the serious repeat offender cohort. This is occurring at the same time that we have seen a 35 per cent decrease in youth offending over the last 10 years; a 30 per cent decrease over the last five; and a three per cent decrease over the last year.

The provisions we speak of today will help the chief executive meet workplace health, safety and fire obligations, prevent riots and injuries to young people, minimise separations of young people, allow young people in detention to attend education and rehabilitation programs, and balance the safety and care of young people, YDC staff and the community.