




Speech By
Jennifer Howard

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Record of Proceedings, 15 March 2023

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (2.00 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023. I do so because the Palaszczuk government has listened to Queenslanders' concerns about how youth crime is impacting their lives and communities. Our top priority is ensuring communities across Queensland are kept safe and that serious repeat young offenders are held to account while also investing in measures that tackle the complex causes of youth crime. Overall, this bill strikes the right balance.

While statistically youth crime rates are declining, the majority of young people who come into contact with the criminal justice system do not offend again following diversion. We have to address the problem of those serious repeat youth offenders who commit crimes that put people's lives in danger and which sometimes have tragic results, as we saw over the recent summer.

Through strengthening the Bail Act, the Youth Justice Act and the Police Powers and Responsibility Act we will target these offenders and be able to respond better to those who engage in serious repeat offending. This will be combined with an investment package of more than \$332 million to focus on prevention, rehabilitation and support measures to divert children away from crime.

I very much welcome this package. I know from talking to people in my community that this is what they want to see. They want to see measures put in place to divert children from crime. It will certainly bolster the already amazing programs that we have helping at-risk kids. In Ipswich, like many communities across the state, we have kids who grow up in dysfunctional environments who need all the support they can get to avoid falling into offending and antisocial behaviour. It is not easy, but there are some great organisations and individuals in my community, for example, that are working and engaging every single day with vulnerable young people.

I acknowledge the Aboriginal elders in the Ipswich community who have been doing this work for decades—as long as I remember—helping divert children away from offending. We have organisations like the Five Bridges Ipswich Community Justice Group. They have been important in working with justice agencies, law enforcement, prisons and Legal Aid to help reduce the number of Indigenous young people in our criminal system. The Murri Court in Ipswich was reinstated in 2019. That has made a huge difference as well.

We know there is a lot more to be done and, unfortunately, First Nations children are over-represented in our juvenile justice system. In a year that we vote for a Voice to Parliament we have to better provide early intervention and diversion to support these at-risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

As I said, we have some great organisations in Ipswich like the Ipswich Community Youth Service, Hannah's House and Project Booyah. I have heard other members mention Project Booyah in this House. They are all doing fantastic work helping vulnerable young children make positive life choices and supporting them with counselling, housing and job readiness.

I have been to many events where I have heard positive stories coming from these programs. While we hear a lot of negative stories, it is important to remember the encouraging, positive stories that we hear. I thank all those people who work with those kids every day.

I have been meeting with school principals over the last couple of months. I acknowledge the work that they do in supporting vulnerable students and families, in addition to educating children. It is often school principals, teaching and support staff who are the first ones to identify concerning issues among children. They can be the first to put them in touch with services that can help them through these difficult periods.

By targeting repeat youth offenders and investing in community safety initiatives we are delivering on our priority to keep Queenslanders safe from crime. But, more importantly for me, our increased investment in grassroots diversion initiatives means that we can lead vulnerable children away from the criminal justice system entirely and make our communities safer in the process.

As many in this House have, I acknowledge the committee that was tasked with inquiring into this bill. I know that it would have been tough at times hearing some of the stories they had to hear in a short space of time and come to some conclusions. I acknowledge the work they did. I commend the bill to the House.