




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.28 pm): In December the Queensland Labor government publicly promised that violent juvenile car thieves will face 14 years jail. Now in the bill before us we see that the maximum penalties are half of what they promised. The sentencing maximum is seven years. Under the sentencing principles contained in the Youth Justice Act, the maximum sentence that juvenile offenders can be sentenced to is still five years. Put simply, not only are maximum sentences rarely applied; the penalties before us cannot be applied and detention as a last resort remains as a sentencing principle.

The government has not been up-front with Queenslanders and cannot be trusted to solve the youth crime crisis affecting our safety—our safety at home, in our places of work, out in the community, on public transport and in shopping precincts. For years the media and the public have been told by multiple Labor ministers that breach of bail does not work. It was actually described as ‘nonsense’ by the police minister. As recently as December 2022, he was still spouting this position. What do we see today? The breach of bail amendment which is an identical copy of the LNP’s previous amendment—yes, the amendment which the government did not allow the LNP to move. What a backflip! How can the people of Queensland believe anything they hear from government ministers about youth crime?

We also had discussions about GPS trackers. The previous GPS monitoring trial was highlighted by the LNP as legislation that would not work, given young offenders had the option not to wear one. Only eight were fitted. The interim review of the trial did not say it was a success, yet it is going to be expanded.

As for the circumstances of aggravation for unlawful use of a motor vehicle if it is posted on social media, how are police to find the resources to (a) monitor social media posts and (b) prove the content of the post? This really is nonsense. Instead, the government should be working with the federal communications minister to ensure social media platforms are obliged to remove such posts in a prompt and timely manner.

Accompanying this legislation has been a flurry of announcements such as the engine immobiliser trial. While it is not a part of this bill, the government has announced a trial of engine immobilisers in Cairns. The parliamentary Transport and Resources Committee investigated this technology back in September 2021. I was a part of that inquiry and I can say that we were unable to identify any jurisdiction in the world which has successfully implemented engine immobilisers across the existing fleet. The expert advice to the committee was that at this time there is no single, in-vehicle technology available. Furthermore, the current technology increases the danger to the driver, passengers and passers-by because the driver loses control over the vehicle. In other words, it is not a good strategy when we are discussing inexperienced, under-age, unlicensed drivers in powerful stolen vehicles.

The truth is that this latest flurry of announcements and amendments is part of yet another so-called 'plan'. I suppose this would be a 10-point plan. We can add it to the plans announced in 2015, 2016, 2019 and 2021. That is a total of 26 points in addition to the 47-point Youth Justice Strategy 2019-2023. The Labor Party is running out of points! There are no more points. The points are done. They have used so many points that they are gone.

Despite all these plans, the Productivity Commission in January this year reported that the number of children in detention in Queensland has been climbing year on year, against the trend nationally. Queenslanders have reached the point where they are frightened in their own homes. They are frightened of being physically assaulted or attacked with a machete in their own home. It is unbelievable that it has come to this in Queensland. Innocent people have died. Businesses cannot obtain insurance. Just ask Darren Bauman at the Dingo Roadhouse in my electorate. Even in these beautiful, peaceful little country towns we are enduring this youth crime crisis.

The whole crisis—and it is a crisis—is completely of Labor's making. Powerful factions within the party went to war against the LNP government's reforms: abolished breach of bail, reintroduced closed courts and reintroduced detention as a last resort; and 17-year-olds were moved into the youth category. These changes were largely introduced to pacify powerful Labor factions. They are driven by ideology and have not survived exposure to reality. What is really insulting for the victims is that we have been completely denied any rights in this process. Labor not only failed to keep Queenslanders safe; it failed to recognise that the justice system must deal with victims as well as offenders.

It would seem that the offenders have all the rights and protections, and the victims get nothing. We in this House recently heard that the government is going to provide some funding for victims, but we have also heard that there is a two-year backlog at Victim Assist. It seems the victims are penalised more than the offenders in the Labor game.

If your car is stolen and destroyed in Gregory, it has a major impact. We have no public transport and taxi services in only two towns. Consequently, much employment is dependent on employees having a driver's licence and transport. The impacts of having your car stolen are life-changing, widespread and long-lasting. When a juvenile thief walks away with no penalty at all, only to play the game again, it is understandable that victims and their families and friends start to fume. Justice has not been served to them.

There has been much preaching from Labor about the benefits of early intervention in preventing youth crime. That is a position I can totally support, so I ask Labor: why not give early intervention a go? They certainly have not yet. Early intervention is not 'early' once the juvenile is already committing the crimes. Early intervention is not trying diversion after the youth has already had contact with police and the courts. Early intervention is certainly not at 12, 15 or 16 years old. Early intervention is from birth, and it requires a whole-of-government approach.

This model was adopted in the US state of Hawaii about 20 years ago. They currently have—for the whole state—a grand total of eight children in detention, and none of them are there for violent crimes like murder and assault. Queensland currently has 300. We need proper services restored for expectant mothers and their babies. Mothers can be assessed for their support needs before they give birth. For particularly vulnerable mothers, that support should take the form of regular home visits for at least the first years. These home visits should offer parenting guidance and education—

Mr Power interjected.

Mr HART: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I am within a couple of feet of the member for Gregory and I cannot hear what is happening over the top of the member for Logan's interjections.

Mr POWER: I take that on board. I do apologise. I note that the member will do the same during question time.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Martin): Member for Logan, that is not a point of order. I ask all members to cease their interjections.

Mr MILLAR: Once children move into the school system, we need Education Queensland to have better strategies in place to keep students engaged. In April last year the *Courier-Mail* revealed shocking statistics on the rate of suspensions and expulsions in Queensland schools, and vulnerable children were the ones copping this. Indigenous children and children with disabilities were three times more likely to receive a suspension. Wait for it: children in care were six times more likely to be excluded. Some receive their first suspension as preppies. That is before we even look at truancy rates among these cohorts. Advocates, including the children's commissioner, have called on Education Queensland to do more to keep children in school in order to combat youth crime. That is right: they explicitly linked these two issues.

Finally, Queensland Health must rapidly increase the availability of drug and alcohol rehabilitation. This would decrease the incidence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. It is the only way to ensure children are not growing up in homes where substance abuse rules the household. Sadly, it is the only way to prevent early drug use by the children themselves. What is the Labor government proposing? That Queensland will have the most relaxed drug possession rules in the nation, and we are going to do this with no rehabilitation option in place. I guarantee that this will mean more children growing up in the care of drug addicted parents. More children will witness domestic violence. More children will be harmed by those who should be caring for them. I directly link this to our youth crime crisis. It is as though we have a whole-of-government approach to betray these vulnerable children and their families.

If you had a seven-year-old child when the Labor government's youth crime crisis started eight years ago, you would now have a 15-year-old. Under the Labor Party's watch this youth crime crisis has continued. It is having a devastating impact in South-East Queensland and of course in Cairns, in Townsville and along the coast, but it is also having a major impact in rural and remote areas. As the member for Condamine said, not only is it happening down here; it is also happening on farms. We see people losing valuable machinery that costs hundreds of thousands of dollars and trying to get back into the trade. When a local diesel mechanic in Longreach has his car stolen, he loses his livelihood. He cannot replace that car in an instant. He cannot go to Avis or Budget and get another ute. All his tools are in the ute when it is stolen.

It is time for the Labor government to step up and start fixing this problem. This has happened under its watch. The Labor government has taken away a lot of things that the LNP government did in terms of youth crime, and now it is starting to bite us. I suggest that the Labor government fixes it up and fixes it up now.