




Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Record of Proceedings, 14 March 2023

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (3.10 pm): No-one should feel unsafe in their community. Locals deserve to be able to go about their lives without the fear of being robbed, assaulted or even murdered. For too long now, regular hardworking Queenslanders have been facing violence in their local communities, on the streets and in their own homes. People across the Gold Coast—and, frankly, right across the state—are feeling desperate and scared. They are fed up with the lack of action from the Palaszczuk Labor government.

This should not be a controversial issue. Innocent people are fearing for their safety because youth criminals are not facing consequences for their actions. That is why the LNP have been putting forward real solutions for Queenslanders. We have been calling on the Palaszczuk Labor government to embed consequences for actions in the Youth Justice Act. One element of this is breach of bail as an offence in the Bail Act. We have been calling on the government to unshackle the judiciary. Judges and magistrates should be free to be able to hand down the sentence that best fits the circumstances of the offending, but the only way they can do that is if they are not shackled by detention as a last resort.

Why are they shackled by this? It is because eight years ago the Palaszczuk Labor government watered down the Youth Justice Act and made detention a last resort. Today, despite promises of a bipartisan approach to fixing the youth crime epidemic, the Palaszczuk government has blocked our proposal to remove detention as a last resort from the Youth Justice Act. The Palaszczuk government has refused to debate the issue, despite adopting our breach of bail policy word for word. Why have we put this on the table? It is because it works hand in hand with breach of bail.

The other aspect of our policy that works hand in hand is delivering gold standard early intervention. It is a very important part of the plan to tackle youth crime. We must have early intervention programs that are working and making a real difference. The only way to ensure this is to analyse the benefits or failings of each of these intervention programs and identify opportunities to break the cycle of crime, but this tired, third-term, lazy government is not prepared to do the work. When I asked the youth justice minister to break down each of the programs to work out which ones are working, the minister said it was too labour intensive. Well, now we see that the Auditor-General is doing the work of this tired, lazy, third-term Labor government. The Auditor-General is now auditing the early intervention programs of the Palaszczuk government—

Government members interjected.

Mrs GERBER: And they think it is funny. Today we are debating the extraordinary backflip of the Labor government. After years of denying there is a problem, after years of saying, 'Breach of bail won't work,' after years of saying, 'We are not in a crime crisis,' they have finally come to the table and are making breach of bail an offence.

Let us look back on what government members said to Queenslanders when we asked for breach of bail to be made an offence in the Bail Act. The Attorney-General said, 'We know what does not work when it comes to young people—and that is called the breach of bail offence.' Then she doubled down on it a couple of months later saying, 'Breach of bail did nothing to reduce crime.' The Minister for Youth Justice said, 'We don't want something that didn't work,' when answering a question without notice about breach of bail. This is the same minister who three days before the Palaszczuk government's breach of bail backflip was still criticising breach of bail, saying that it was 'ineffective'.

For too long, this state government have put their heads in the sand when it comes to youth crime. They have not been up-front with Queenslanders. They have not been up-front with Queenslanders about the content of this bill. This bill proposes to increase maximum sentences for stealing a car to 10 years or with aggravated circumstances to 14 years, but what this government are not telling Queenslanders is that this proposal is completely redundant if it is not coupled with changes to the Youth Justice Act because there are provisions in the Youth Justice Act that put a cap on maximum sentences. Magistrates can only sentence a youth to one year and superior courts are limited to five years.

This did not stop the Premier from promising on 29 December last year that 'Violent juvenile car thieves will face more jail time' and that they were 'increasing the maximum penalty for stealing a car from 7 to 10 years' imprisonment'. I put these questions. How many repeat offenders do you think will be sentenced to 10 years for stealing a car? How many will be sentenced to 14 years for an offence committed at night? Labor cannot deliver on this promise, and they cannot deliver on this promise because they know that the Youth Justice Act limits the sentences.

Labor are misleading the people of Queensland, and once again this Premier has failed to show up for victims of crime in their hour of need. Moreover, they have failed a generation of children. If the Premier is looking for someone to blame, she need look no further than in the mirror because the reality is that this youth crime epidemic is a result of failed legislation and failed leadership. Where we are today is a consequence of the Palaszczuk Labor government watering down the laws eight years ago.

One of the Palaszczuk Labor government's first orders of business when they came to power in 2015 was to dismantle our youth crime legislation. They abolished breach of bail as an offence, they shackled the judiciary by making detention a last resort and they closed the Childrens Court so that no-one could see or report on what was happening. This is not even scratching the surface of the Youth Justice Act. It has been stripped back so much that we now have a generation of repeat youth offenders who have no consequences for their actions and they know that is the case. They are brazenly flirting with the law and flaunting it. This state government continue to put the rights of criminals above the rights of victims.

In my electorate of Currumbin, I have been speaking with a huge number of constituents who are really concerned with the rising crime in the area. I have residents calling me and emailing my office about youth car thefts along with break-ins. The number of young people reoffending on the Gold Coast has skyrocketed 91 per cent since 2017, and almost 70 per cent of juveniles who completed a youth justice program in 2021 went on to reoffend. That is a damning indictment on this government. Our communities are being terrorised and we have a generation of young repeat offenders who are breaking into people's homes, who are stealing cars, who are armed and who are posting about it, and in the worst and most horrific circumstances, Queenslanders are dying as a result.

I know that in my Currumbin community we have a number of Neighbourhood Watch groups working overtime to try to do their bit to help our community because this state government is not stepping up. I would like to acknowledge Victoria from Currumbin Waters who has been working hard to set up another Neighbourhood Watch group in the area. Victoria and many like her have a passion for our beautiful area and want to do all they can to protect our way of life. Neighbourhood Watch groups work closely with local police who are desperately under-resourced right across Queensland. While youth crime has risen, police resources have remained stagnant and in some cases have gone backwards.

I also want to acknowledge the incredible work that community groups and charities are doing in my local area. I have spoken in this place before about Fight 4 Youth, a fantastic local charity which operates in my electorate of Currumbin. Leisa and the team have partnered with local schools to support suspended students, vulnerable youth and young offenders with the early intervention programs she runs. She receives no state government funding. Her objective is to strengthen their relationships, to inspire them and to keep them out of detention centres. Fight 4 Youth is doing what this state government cannot do. She is not funded by the government, yet she is doing her best to try to help the youth in our community.

The track record of the Palaszczuk Labor government on law and order is horrific. For years, they have viewed this as a political problem. They are more concerned with announcements and how things look than actually stopping the cycle of crime and protecting our communities. The fact that it has taken this long for the Palaszczuk Labor government to consider meaningful action on this issue is a really sad testament to their style of government. Even then they had to copy and paste from LNP policy. Our breach of bail amendment—straight up copied and pasted—is exactly the amendment that is proposed in this bill.

Let me be clear, I will support the amendments proposed in this bill, but I give this warning to the state government: this bill falls well short. It falls well short because it leaves so many questions unanswered, questions like: when will we know the government's plan to overhaul early intervention? We know that the government is not looking at early intervention in the way it should. We know that the Auditor-General is having to do the job of this state Labor government and do an audit on early intervention programs because this government will not do the work to find out what is working and what is not working. That is the only way we stop the cycle of crime. This bill falls well short as we need to unshackle the judiciary in order to achieve outcomes. We need gold standard—

Honourable members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): Pause the clock!

Mrs GERBER: This bill is failing to deliver both of those.