




Speech By  
**Laura Gerber**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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**POLICE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND OTHER LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL 2022 AND THE POLICE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES  
AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2023**

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (11.53 am): In the middle of a youth crime crisis this Palaszczuk government is moving to weaken our drug laws. If honourable members ever wanted an example of how this government has all its priorities wrong, this is it. The cognate debate today addresses proposed amendments regarding a broad range of significant issues that affect Queenslanders. I want to make it clear that the LNP supports the introduction of a circumstance of aggravation for the offence of evading police. We support strengthening the ability of police to monitor reportable offenders to investigate organised crime and cybercrime and to address the danger and disruption caused by hooning.

However, amongst these QPS administrative arrangements and laws relating to criminal activity the Labor government is proposing to weaken our drug laws by allowing all dangerous drugs and schedule 4 and schedule 8 drugs to be included in an expanded drug diversion program. It is essentially the first step towards decriminalising dangerous illicit drugs including schedule 8 and schedule 4 drugs like fentanyl. This is the wrong approach. It is bad policy. The government has blamed the crime epidemic on ice addicted youths and now with this legislation this government is signalling to those youth that ice is acceptable, that it is a health problem not a criminal problem. It is a health problem, but we also have to signal that it is criminal.

Seriously, where are we in this state when we let people off who are caught with a gram of ice, a gram of heroin or a gram of cocaine or fentanyl not the first time, not the second time, but the third time? Where are we when we do not have a criminal prosecution for the possession of those kinds of dangerous drugs? The law is the ultimate signal to our community of what is and is not acceptable. By allowing serious drug possession on three occasions before prosecution this government is signalling to our community that drug use is okay.

**Ms Grace:** It's not serious drug possession.

**Mrs GERBER:** I hear the minister saying that it is not serious drug possession. We are talking about heroin; we are talking about ice, methamphetamine; and we are talking about fentanyl, which is one of the strongest opioids on the market and it kills.

I know there is a proportion of the community out there that uses drugs recreationally and they never come into contact with police. However, it is the fear of prosecution, it is the fear of gaining a criminal history that keeps the drug use of those people in check. I fear that by removing this, by lowering the bar, by allowing three strikes before involving the criminal justice system we will start seeing an increase in drug use in our communities. The drug cartels will make the most of these weak drug laws. They will be telling those youth who are already involved in the criminal justice system to get less than a gram because they will not be prosecuted.

How can the government say that in this bill they are taking the strongest possible action for people involved in the drug trade while at the same time they are weakening our drug laws? This is not a consistent approach. It is completely chaotic, but that is what we have come to expect from this government—absolute chaos. We saw the extraordinary backflip from the Premier on breach of bail after the Premier said it would not work, and now we know why: it was a deal with the left. The left marched into the Premier's office and said, 'We'll support you on breach of bail but we want our weakened drug laws.' They took their ransom sheet in there and this is what Queenslanders get: absolute chaos.

There was no external consultation on this bill. There was completely inadequate time for the committee to consider it. The safety of Queenslanders is being put at risk because of the dysfunction and absolute chaos—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Martin): Pause the clock.

**Ms Boyd** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Pine Rivers. I ask all members to stop their interjecting. The volume is getting too loud and I am struggling to hear the member for Currumbin.

**Mrs GERBER:** I will speak a bit louder, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The safety of Queenslanders is being put at risk because of the dysfunction and chaos of this Palaszczuk Labor government. This government cares more about how things look than how things are. They are putting politics over people. I suspect they are doing this also to cover up the fact that they are failing on their promise to put more police on the beat. I suspect that this part of the police powers and responsibilities bill is included as their solution to the fact that they are failing on their commitment to put more police on the beat. The solution to our stretched police force is not for the government to turn a blind eye to crime and weaken our drug laws. It is extremely concerning that the watering down of our drug laws is being justified as a means to provide police efficiency.

The minister has indicated that around 17,000 drug offenders would be eligible for police drug diversion under this bill, diverting them from the criminal justice system into the health system. While I agree with the need to promote police efficiency and I agree that we need a health response to the drug problem, it is critical that any such initiatives do not conflict with the need to maintain a sensible and measured response to illegal behaviour. I do not know how Labor members can look their constituents in the eye and say that they are protecting them whilst introducing this legislation. They are failing on their promise to add 1,450 police by 2025. In fact, in some stations police numbers have gone backwards. Crime has never been more of a concern for the people of Currumbin and my constituents. On the Gold Coast alone there have been over 200 cars stolen in the last month; that is six a day. There have been 340 break-ins in the last month; that is 10 a day. There have been 1,138 other thefts; that is nearly 34 per day. There have been 233 other property damage offences; that is seven per day. There have been 271 assaults; that is nine assaults per day. Our police officers are doing their absolute best. They are serving our community and they are fronting up every day, but this government refuses to properly resource them.

The police minister has foreshadowed an amendment to this bill to allow retired constables to come back as special constables. I question whether this has been included in the bill to cover up the fact that the government is failing to recruit and get more police on the beat. The LNP supports this amendment, but the state government must admit that it has misled Queenslanders about the true state of police numbers in Queensland. If police numbers were soaring as the police minister claimed, why did this decision to allow retiring police officers to return to the service need to be made? It does not add up and, in my view, it is clear proof that this government knows that it is failing in its commitment to recruit and get more police on the beat. It is failing in their promise to recruit 1,450 more police.

Then there is the idea that our health system—already at crisis point—can cope with the number of people who are proposed to be diverted into it under this new legislation. Evidence-based drug diversion programs do work. I am not disputing the validity of evidence-based drug diversion programs, but they cannot take the place of law and order and they must be properly resourced in order to be effective. This state government is failing to do all of that.

In the brief time that I have left I want to address the hooning laws, because my community has been plagued by hooning. We must work together to ensure hooning, which is dangerous, is addressed in our communities. Recently in Elanora, a hooning car ended up on the doorstep of a resident's house, almost crashing through their home. We need stronger laws to combat hooning, so I welcome these amendments, but I again question whether the Labor government has provided police with the resources to be able to effectively implement and enforce the legislation being considered today. How can the Premier and Minister Ryan plan on ensuring offenders are caught without resourcing our police? The thin blue line has never been thinner and this state government is failing in its duty.