




Speech By
Mark Robinson

MEMBER FOR OODGEROO

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Dr ROBINSON** (Oodgeroo—LNP) (3.30 pm): I rise today to speak to the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023, a bill that amends the Bail Act 1980, the Criminal Code, the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000 and the Youth Justice Act 1992 for particular purposes. Clearly, things are not working well with respect to community safety under the current government despite claims to the contrary. Changes made to legislation by the Palaszczuk government since 2015 have weakened the laws and made our communities less safe. As a result of these changes, crime has increased, particularly crime committed by young repeat offenders. Here we are at the Queensland parliament yet again revisiting the legislation because the previous changes made by the government have not worked. They have not increased community safety overall. They are yet another reactive attempt to window-dress the problem. The current youth justice system is failing and it is failing everyone at every level.

The LNP has consistently advocated on behalf of Queenslanders for this government to be tougher on crime so that our communities are safer. The LNP has always been very clear on what we believe is the solution—multiple solutions—to the rampant youth crime issue. Firstly, we have talked about bringing back breach of bail as an offence. After years of campaigning on behalf of Queenslanders we are pleased to see the government has finally agreed to reinstate breach of bail as an offence for young offenders. I note that the government opposed this policy at every turn and now in the eleventh hour it has adopted it. The government publicly and on the record criticised the LNP's calls for breach of bail to be made an offence. Its members have been dragged kicking and screaming but they have finally taken a step in the right direction. This is an acknowledgement from the government that its decision to water down the youth justice laws in 2015 was a mistake and has created a generation of repeat offenders. It is also just another case of the LNP having to govern from opposition.

The second aspect is removing the rule of detention as a last resort in sentencing. Removing detention as a last resort will unshackle judges and give them discretion to send young criminals to detention when it is warranted. I am advised that under Labor's watch serious repeat offenders have increased from 10 per cent to 17 per cent in the 2021-22 financial year. Sadly, in terms of tougher sentencing, Premier Palaszczuk has not turned up to parliament with the laws that Queenslanders need now—the whole suite of laws they need—let alone the ones she promised to Queenslanders. Some of the maximum sentences she promised have not made their way into the legislation. The government cannot be trusted to get even that right.

The third area is an independent audit of early intervention programs. We must get serious about early intervention services. Auditing the current funds going to youth crime programs and other youth programs will improve investment and ensure that programs are having maximum impact in helping to get young repeat offenders back on track before it is too late. The question is: to what degree is the funding well targeted? Has Labor implemented appropriate early intervention strategies? The LNP wrote to the Auditor-General, who has advised that a performance audit will be conducted in the

2023-24 financial year. A full audit of all existing programs is needed to identify failures and opportunities, what has been working and what has not been working. Much more must be done in this area to ensure effective use of the resources.

The LNP has been unwavering in our fight for these proposed solutions to be adopted by the government amongst other things. Sadly, the government is in denial regarding the seriousness of the youth crime crisis and routinely ignores solutions to the problem put forward by the community and the opposition. It seems to take horrific tragedies or spikes in youth crime in communities to shake this government out of complacency. When that has occurred the government is more interested in window-dressing than in tough solutions. It looks for the political solutions instead of doing the hard yards and governing for the people of Queensland. Sadly, the government sees things more as a political problem than a crime problem. Its youth crime policy seems to be more about looking busy but not really taking the actions that are needed. What the government has been doing obviously is not effective. The fact that we are back here yet again amending the same legislation is clear proof of that.

The government objectives of the bill, other than to look like it is doing something meaningful in response to a crisis, have been well covered by others in detail so in the interests of time I will not repeat them today. Sadly, the main objective—to fix the youth crime crisis—will not be achieved by this legislation. As the Queensland Law Society has stated, the laws will not have any significant effect on crime rates. This scathing submission is a damning assessment of the overall changes being proposed.

In terms of my local area, our Redlands Coast and Cleveland district community want more from the government than band-aids. In my community reports of crimes to my office are ever increasing. Reports of violence reported to my office and to local police—and even today there was one from a father about his daughter who was attacked in Cleveland—are increasing. I speak of breaking and entering, car thefts, hooning and antisocial behaviour among other crimes in places like Cleveland Point, Wellington Point and elsewhere in the Redlands Coast. They seem to be on the increase, certainly going by the numbers reported to my office, despite the hard work of our good local police, who do an excellent job.

This rise in the number and range of crimes committed by juvenile offenders is a cause of great concern and anxiety in the community. In January when the Premier was away and did not recall parliament to deal with the crisis, there were many incidents reported in the South Brisbane district, which includes Redlands. I will not go into the figures except to say that they show an increase in a number of areas such as car theft, other forms of theft, unlawful entry—a whole range of areas.

I have been working constructively with community groups and the police and I wish to take a moment to thank them and acknowledge the work they do. The local Crime Stoppers groups, Volunteers in Policing, victims of crime groups and local Neighbourhood Watch type groups are all working together with the community and local law enforcement, and I thank them for that. Other community-based groups working in this space include The Cage Youth Foundation, Redlands Local Drug Action Team, Youth You Program and the Traction youth program among others.

I also acknowledge the many local churches in our region that run youth programs and have youth groups that often go unmentioned. These church youth programs help many young people outside the churches find a place of acceptance and support that often is not considered or counted in data or statistics on youth work. Sadly, some Labor MPs have attacked some of these churches and their programs and they have gone on to attack the very youth programs such as The Cage that actually help troubled young people get back on track. Those attacks extend to the repeated undermining of our chappies in state schools and the RI workers who teach good life principles and healthy values to young people.

I urge the education minister to continue to listen to the whole community on these helpful programs and ignore aggressive political campaigns against our chappies, our RI teachers, church-based youth programs and faith-based schools, all of which help young people. Sadly, those attacks seem to be purely because they are Christian. Some of the commentary borders on faith phobia and discrimination. To say that government will not work with certain people because they have a faith is a disgrace and completely unacceptable in an Australian parliament. To refuse to work with someone or a group or to reject them working in a state school because of their religion, race, age or sex is absolute discrimination, especially when they are working with young people in order to help them.

Ms FARMER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Member for Oodgeroo, I have been listening carefully and I ask you to come back to the long title of the bill.

Dr ROBINSON: I am very happy to talk about youth intervention programs and the various programs that support young people and prevent them turning to crime. We are all working collaboratively to support our police. I commend our Cleveland Police Station and the local officers who serve with honour despite the uphill battle. I thank those in the Capalaba Police Station, which services some of my electorate, and all of the police who work across the Redlands. We need to ensure the numbers of police are kept high and strong and not reduced in our region. That is really important. I call on the government to ensure those numbers are kept high. I thank shadow minister Dale Last for his recent visit. We will continue to support our police in this area.