




Speech By
Michael Crandon

MEMBER FOR COOMERA

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (3.43 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023. On 21 February 2023 the Minister for Police and Corrective Services finally introduced a bill to address the explosion of youth offending in Queensland. We on this side of the House have been calling for action for many years. Following its tabling, the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023 was referred to the Economics and Governance Committee for detailed consideration and report. I thank the EGC secretariat for the huge effort they put in to ensure we were able to—in a very short time frame—do what the government did not do, and that is consult with Queenslanders.

Report No. 41 of the Economics and Governance Committee was tabled on time on 10 March. The main objective of this bill is to cauterise the wound, so to speak, with a focus on those few hundred recidivist offenders—up from 10 per cent to 17 per cent recently—that are committing half of the serious crimes being perpetrated by youth in this state. This is the first step, in my view. A great deal more needs to be done, with the ultimate aim of keeping the community safe by strengthening youth justice laws to respond to serious repeat offenders.

This bill will amend the Bail Act 1980, the Queensland Criminal Code, the Youth Justice Act 1992 and the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000. The amendments are intended, among other things, to increase the maximum penalty for the unlawful use or possession of motor vehicles, aircraft or vessels, although the jury is out on what those maximum penalties will actually be. The bill will create new circumstances of aggravation for the offence of unlawful use or possession of relevant vehicles, including if offenders publish material about their involvement in or of the offending on social media; where the offending occurs at night; or where the offender uses or threatens violence, is or pretends to be armed, is in company and damages or threatens to damage any property. The bill will make it an offence for children to breach a condition of their bail undertaking and will extend and expand the trial of electronic monitoring as a condition of bail for a further two years and to include eligible 15-year-olds. The important thing here is that electronic monitoring needs to be properly trialled.

The bill will remove the requirement that police consider alternatives to arrest under certain circumstances; provide that a child's bail history must be considered during sentencing; create the ability of a sentencing court to declare that a child offender is a serious repeat offender in certain circumstances to ensure such things as community safety are a paramount consideration; enable conditional release orders to operate for a greater period of time; ensure certain child offenders serve their suspended term of detention if they breach their conditional release orders; expand the list of offences included within the definition of 'prescribed indictable offence' for children declared serious repeat offenders; enable the transfer of persons who have turned 18 years from youth detention centres to adult prisons; and ensure the continuation of multiagency collaborative panels.

Sadly, this bill falls short of what is needed, and we on this side of the House will continue in our endeavours to repair youth crime laws in Queensland. Before presenting this bill, the government did not consult with relevant parties. We have. Following extensive consultation with victims, police,

advocacy groups and the broader Queensland community, we have determined additional actions that we will pursue beyond the changes proposed in this bill. The Palaszczuk Labor government watered down the Youth Justice Act eight years ago, and we have seen an ever-increasing escalation in youth crime. The three broad actions in our initial plan, developed before release of the detail of this bill was made known, are designed to start implementing the change that Queenslanders are urgently calling for ahead of further long-term reforms.

The first of the LNP actions to embed consequences for actions by introducing breach of bail as an offence for young offenders in the Bail Act has now been accepted by the Palaszczuk Labor government. This is despite minister after minister refusing to accept our call for this element to be included in legislation over an extended period of time and as recently as just days before the bill was tabled. Breach of bail as an offence will ensure consequences for actions by young recidivist offenders, as is currently the case for adults.

As a matter of priority, should the LNP be successful in forming government following the October 2024 Queensland state election we will unshackle the judiciary, who have had their hands tied since the Palaszczuk Labor government watered down the laws to require them to consider detention as a last resort when sentencing young offenders. The removal of the provision of detention as a last resort will allow the judiciary to detain young offenders who must be taken off our streets. They will retain the option to direct offenders to early intervention programs when appropriate, but the judiciary must be free to make the right decision for the right circumstances.

As well, we will start delivering gold standard early interventions. As a first step, we have requested an immediate and independent investigation by the Auditor-General into early intervention programs that are currently funded by the state government to analyse the benefits and failings of each program and to identify future opportunities to break the cycle of youth offending. We will use the Auditor-General's findings to start delivering those gold standard early intervention programs across the state to ensure we see a marked reversal in youth crime, thus providing a healthier and safer community that all Queenslanders can be proud of.

These additional changes are sensible additions to begin the journey towards community safety. The first priority of any government is to ensure the safety of its citizens. Queenslanders deserve better than to feel like a prisoner in their own homes and be worried that they are not safe out in their own communities. Between now and the election we will continue to listen to Queenslanders and build a full youth crime framework with a view to repairing Labor's broken laws. Under Labor, the number of young offenders in Queensland has increased every year above the 2015 levels it inherited, with the number of serious repeat offenders rising in the last few months from 10 per cent to 17 per cent. This is Labor's legacy on youth crime.

Beyond these strategies designed to fight youth crime, we need to go further with intervention programs. We need to identify and engage with at-risk groups in our community. We need to develop programs that assist our children from when they are, as I refer to them, gummies and ankle biters—indeed, from when our children are still in their mother's womb. We need to work with our families. We need to work with our preschools. We need to engage with our preppies and their families. We already have some programs in place, but they are few and far between. We need programs throughout our education system from preschool to year 12 and in the meantime we need to work with this recidivist youth cohort to give them a better chance at life. Only then will we see an improvement over time when we no longer have this youth crime crisis.