




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (3.10 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023. The bill was introduced into the House by the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services, Mark Ryan, on 21 February 2023 and referred to the Economics and Governance Committee to report on 10 March 2023.

The first issue raised by submitters was the short time frame on such an important piece of legislation that affects each and every Queenslanders. This bill was not the result of the Palaszczuk government being proactive in regard to youth crime activity; this was as a result of the rising anger in the community at the lack of competence and the complete failure of this Palaszczuk government to enforce law and order on behalf of the Queensland public, and some of the shocking events that occurred over the Christmas period.

We now have a bill introduced by government to try to undo the damage that their own legislation has caused across the last eight years. The objectives of the bill include increasing the maximum penalty for car theft from seven years to 10 years and increasing the maximum penalty for using or threatening to use a motor vehicle to commit an indictable offence from 10 to 12 years imprisonment. These offenders are not receiving the maximum sentence now and will not under this bill unless there is an important amendment moved to the Youth Justice Act. The act states that under a magistrate juvenile criminals can only be imprisoned for a maximum of one year, under a District Court judge a maximum of five years. The Premier promised Queenslanders on 29 December 2022—

Violent juvenile car thieves will face 14 years jail in a suite of increased penalties aimed squarely at keeping the community safe.

It has now been confirmed Labor's new proposed laws cannot override section 175 of the Youth Justice Act—another deliberate deception by this Palaszczuk Labor government to all Queenslanders who are trying to keep their families, homes and properties safe from repeat youth offenders. On Tuesday morning in this House the shadow minister, Dale Last, attempted to move an amendment to remove the clause that a custodial sentence be an option of last resort. Unless that amendment is passed, we will continue to see repeat offenders released on bail and reoffending shortly after they leave the police station door. Predictably, the government members voted against allowing the shadow minister to move this amendment so this bill is already doomed to failure.

Under this government's watch we have seen crimes committed by serious repeat offenders increase from 10 per cent to 17 per cent, a massive increase for all of us to witness. The bill also proposes to create a new offence where the offender has published material advertising their involvement in the offending on social media. This behaviour is particularly frustrating and offensive to victims who have had their property stolen—quite often vehicles—and then see the offenders boasting of their crimes on social media. Proving this will apparently be problematic, according to some of the submitters. The bill states that it will also introduce an offence where the offending occurs at night, where the offender uses or threatens violence or pretends to be armed in company and damages or threatens to damage any property. Some of the submitters stated that these offences are a duplication of laws that already exist.

The bill also extends and expands the trial of electronic monitoring as a condition of bail for a further two years to include eligible 15-year-olds. The irony of this amendment will not be lost on the Queensland public. It would be difficult to find a more public policy failure than this government's electronic monitoring devices program. To date there have only been eight devices fitted due to offenders having the right to refuse to wear them and in some areas an inability to actually track them. This is an announcement of a policy that this government has already proven that it is incapable of implementing.

A significant amendment is to provide that it is an offence for children to breach a condition of their bail undertaking. Where do we start with this one? What a revelation those opposite have had. After years of stating that breach of bail would not work, in the face of an increasingly hostile electorate the Premier has suddenly decided that breach of bail is an issue. The police minister Mark Ryan and the youth justice minister Leanne Linard were at a public crime forum in Toowoomba only days before the announcement stating their opposition to breach of bail as an offence. The youth justice minister was particularly vocal on this subject. The Premier had obviously lost faith in the failed youth justice minister and the failed police minister to make any meaningful impact on the ever-increasing crime wave across Queensland and made a captain's call to stem the bleeding of support for this government. No-one had been more strident in their opposition to breach of bail than the Attorney, Shannon Fentiman. In fact, it would appear that this amendment has little support from the left so it has been interesting to hear the contributions from those opposite as they try to convince the public that they support this change, which is more about appeasing the public with little to no intention to actually enforce it. Bringing back breach of bail as an offence is something that the LNP has been advocating for for years.

The bill also states that it will remove the requirement that police consider alternatives to arrest if they reasonably suspect a child on bail has contravened or is contravening a bail condition. The victims of crime have been screaming for this for years. Recidivist youth criminals have been operating with impunity for years and there has been no consequence for breaching bail conditions. The bill also states that a child's bail history must be taken into account during sentencing. It is my understanding this information is already available to the magistrate.

The bill will create the ability of a sentencing court to declare that a child offender is a serious repeat offender in certain circumstances to enable considerations such as community safety to be paramount and ensure certain child offenders serve their suspended term of detention if they breach their conditional release orders. Let us watch this space. The bill will enable the transfer of persons who have turned 18 years on remand and the earlier transfer of persons who have turned 18 years serving a sentence from youth detention centres to adult correctional centres. This was another massive fail by this government. When the Palaszczuk government moved 17-year-old offenders from adult prisons to youth detention centres it had a direct impact on the rise of youth offending.

Victims of crime are sick of this weak Palaszczuk government's stance on crime and the electorate of Condamine is not immune. Condamine has always been considered a protected community where people feel safe and secure. Not anymore. Burnt out stolen cars on the back roads of Condamine are now commonplace. Others just dump them on the side of the highway. Residents are not safe on the road, on the sidewalk, at their workplace or in their own homes. I have met with many victims who are terrified to stay in their own homes. Many of these are elderly without the means to purchase extensive security and surveillance equipment and they really should not have to. In your own home you should feel safe.

I remember going to a house outside Kingsthorpe where the house was broken into while the residents were away—and I mean literally broken into with a rock thrown through the window. The house was ransacked. Every drawer and cupboard was gone through with valuables stolen. A four-wheel drive in a detached garage was driven out through a closed roller door. The house had security cameras and when the footage was shown to the police officers they knew the offenders. The culprits were arrested. One of them had been on 28 previous charges and was immediately released on bail. This adds to the frustration of the police officers who are constantly arresting the same offenders. The shopping centres in Toowoomba are not safe for shoppers or the staff who work in them. While working at one of those stores on Christmas Eve my daughter was assaulted by a shoplifter. Country shoppers are avoiding shopping centres as they do not feel safe.

Crime has become so widespread that even the family farm is not immune. We are receiving a constant flow of reports of thefts on farms on the Downs, including private homes being broken into at all times of the day. There are many examples of vehicles, motorbikes, tools and increasingly copper being stolen from farm sheds. Fuel is being stolen on a regular basis, with one farmer witnessing from his kitchen window two men filling up their car in broad daylight, a brazen act with total disregard for anyone else's property. The wiring is being stripped from farm sheds, water bores, drain augers, batteries from tractors—the list goes on.

Recently the grain silos at Norwin were broken into with a damage bill of over \$150,000. As a privately owned grain storage business, the owner will be footing this bill. There are many cases of landowners being targeted multiple times: reinstalling wiring only to see it stripped and stolen again. One landowner has had his security cameras stolen. When a tradesman or a farmer has their work ute stolen they lose their tools of trade as well as their means of travel and the wait time to replace that vehicle can be many months.

I recently spoke to a long serving police officer who told me that in his 25 years in the force he has never seen the force under so much pressure and morale at such a low ebb. This government has stated that this legislation will resolve the issue. I am not so sure about that.