




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (3.26 pm): This issue of youth crime is, without a doubt, the biggest issue in my Mermaid Beach electorate, and has been for quite a time. Unfortunately, it has not abated. The fact that we even have this bill today shows that this government has finally woken up to address this ongoing problem. We have raised the matter of youth crime time and time again in the House; I have on behalf of my constituents. I have had parents of these young criminal offenders—nice parents providing great backgrounds—express that their kid is out of control and they want him locked up. I have had victims come to see me. I have a street full of victims who seem to have been the target of the so-called 100 kids who are in our South-East Queensland area. I understand from our police that there are 400 statewide who are identified as these young repeat criminal offenders. It is a matter that we have to address.

The only reason this bill is in here is because the polling that the Labor Party would have done would have shown the Premier, when she went into the room to say, 'You, you and you,' and all the lefties that are against this would lose their seats,' and that is exactly the way we have this rushed bill come through to the House on youth crime.

It is the same as the promises we have heard time and time again from Minister Ryan saying, 'We have the toughest youth criminal laws in Queensland.' They have not worked time and time again, as evidenced by the fact that we have this bill in the House today. Weren't the tracking bracelets a big success? They were a badge of honour for the kids, and they would go out to commit crimes again. Increasing the penalty from 10 to 15 years in this bill has no relevance to the reality of the fact that there has not been a 10-year conviction imposed for them anywhere anyway.

During the short consultation period we had as a committee to take the views of submitters across the state we heard time and time again that the bill does not go far enough to address the 400 young criminals throughout the state who are causing this major problem. Even my wife leaves the keys to the car out so if somebody breaks in—and it has happened throughout our suburb—they will take the keys and no-one in the house will be stabbed, as has happened. We know about those incidents and we feel very sad for those people who have been caught up in that situation. Their family life has been ruined forever by these youth criminals. That is unfortunately at the feet of this government which has watered down the legislation we put in place to keep these young crims off the street.

The biggest problem we have—and it was brought up at all our meetings—was the fact that the Youth Justice Act has in it a mandating provision. We know the Law Society and the lefties opposite are against mandating any servitude in terms of custodial services and yet they are mandating to our judiciary—who are supposedly independent but are not capable of making their own judgements on these criminal offenders—that they not give custodial sentences. That tells us that they are not going to solve the problem. I guarantee we will be back in here within six months—or at least before the election—debating more legislation because this bill will not solve the problem relating to those young

kids. They go off to court and the judges' hands are tied. They let them out again and they become free-range juvenile offenders. They get out again and they are at it the next night because they do not know any different.

I take on board the member for Cooper's submission to the committee, which was very good, in terms of putting forward matters that should be addressed at the early stages. I agree with those sorts of things. However, we have a problem now which is the fact that these young offenders are out in the community and they will remain in the community. The provision regarding breach of bail as an offence is a help—and we recommended it back in April of 2021 but the government voted against it.

What we have here is a knee-jerk reaction to a polling problem of the government. I know some of their blue-collar areas were identified in terms of that polling; it was affecting those particular areas as well. That is why we have the legislation before the House. Unfortunately, those opposite have not addressed the major problem in the changes to the Youth Justice Act. We support all the other measures. We have been calling for breach of bail as a criminal offence for a long time, so we support that; and there is no way in the world we are not going to vote for any similar measures whatsoever going forward. All the talk about other measures such as more intervention, more tracking devices—all those things are not going to affect those 100 repeat offenders who will be out there offending again the next night.

I am very pleased that the Auditor-General is now conducting that audit of the social services and government assistance agencies to find out what is going wrong in the delivery of those matters to work on the prevention side before we get to the actual criminal activity of these young crims. Quite clearly, we need absolute, quantified results from these matters. The fact that these kids come from broken homes, from homes where drugs are involved, from homes where they have been swapped from one carer to the other and sometimes have suffered abuse, as we have heard, at the hands of carers adds to the fact that these young criminals have no understanding between right and wrong. No amount of promises and caring will address their behaviour until they are taken into a custodial sentence away from the community so that they do not continue their crime waves. Instead, that can be addressed and they can be re-educated in those systems—and they have worked. We have heard examples of that. The other day one lady called me and talkback radio and said her child was re-educated in one of those programs and is now a successful project manager for one of the large building and construction companies north of Brisbane.

The problem can be fixed; it can be addressed but we need positive steps from the government in terms of legislation, but this legislation does not go far enough. That mandated clause regarding the judges needs to be removed. That will assist. There also needs to be more assistance—the gold standard, if you like—in terms of the outcomes from the Auditor-General's report which should be adopted. I speak of what he identifies as the shortcomings in government policy for the future regarding early intervention for these young criminals. We are not going to get anywhere unless we address these matters.

In the case of my area, the 100 recidivist kids need to be taken away and out of the community to undertake a re-education program. They need to be kept away from my community, which is sick of having their homes broken into, their keys and cars stolen, and threats being made. The big problem is that with these break-ins there seems to now be an attitude that they need to take along a knife. I suppose they do that for self-protection because some victims are starting to take a cricket bat to them and those types of things. However, when those offenders carry a knife there is the possibility of a very untoward outcome for both them and the victims.

Speaking of victims, I think that the committee was unanimous in its support for victims who did not receive any financial support from the government for the damage that was done and, importantly, did not receive counselling or fair treatment by the police in these matters. They are important issues to be addressed for the future. It is a problem that can be fixed and it is a problem that can be fixed rather easily if we just put our nose to the grindstone and not take up those idealistic philosophies that kids cannot be locked up, because they need to be locked up.