




Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**

**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

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### **STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (2.20 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023. I do this as the elected state member for the most crime-riddled community in Queensland, my beloved home in North-West Queensland. For anyone who does not know, Mount Isa has been dubbed the Alice Springs of Queensland and has been given the unenviable title of 'sin city' by people from Tennant Creek who come to escape alcohol bans, as people from Mornington Island did for eight or more years as the alcohol management plans impacted there.

On a per capita basis, Mount Isa has the highest crime rate in Queensland. It is a town of around 18,000 people, but in 2022 alone there were 788 homes broken into, that were reported, and 195 cars stolen. Car thefts have more than doubled in four years and break-ins have gone up by almost 50 per cent. Hold-ups are no longer done using verbal threats or by throwing rocks at a window; they are now done with knives, which has resulted in multiple stabbings. Our elderly are regularly accosted outside the grocery store by adults and youth as they try to get to their cars.

At the outset, I will say that the KAP will support the bill although we are not excited about it. It is probably the wrong word to use, but it seems criminally irresponsible to use this bill as a response to the enormous momentum and demand for meaningful change that has built up in the public. That is the really disappointing thing about what is being delivered here today. We will be moving our amendments and I will talk to those soon. Have they already been circulated, member for Hinchinbrook?

**Mr Dametto:** Yes.

**Mr KATTER:** I will table those now because these debates often get truncated, which is outside of our control.

*Tabled paper:* Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023, amendments to be moved by Mr Nick Dametto MP [307](#).

I will talk about some aspects of the government's bill. I am going to zero in mainly on that one issue where I find people miss the point on some of this. The government is adding the extra resources, the multiagency collaborative panels, for the high recidivist kids we need to focus on. We would all have to agree on that point—that we need to focus on the small number of high recidivist offenders—but the problem I have is that so many of the people who are making this policy are detached from the reality of what we are dealing with in a place like Mount Isa.

In the last conversation I had with someone from one of the departments out there, she did not go straight to the high rates of violence, domestic violence and assaults among the people we attend to in Mount Isa. That was not it. She said the biggest problem was recruitment and trying to fill the spots that were there. This was a couple of years ago. That problem has not gone away; it has only been exacerbated. They are trying to recruit for the existing staff to handle it, but we are now talking about bringing in another 30 staff to micromanage these kids. Pardon me for being a little bit cynical, but that is going to be pretty difficult to achieve. I would love to be a part of the solution to help with that, but you cannot say you will turn the tide by magically finding these extra resources and bringing them in.

Then you have competency, and I talked about this last night in the debate on the blue card bill. Most of the people who we want on the ground in those spaces who have the lived experience are not the ones in these jobs. The joke among all the mayors in the Aboriginal communities is that all the seagulls that come in on FIFO have all the competency certificates that everyone is comfortable with but they do not do the job; they cannot get past the front gate. As the member for Hinchinbrook said, that is the critical bit. It is not just a figure of speech. You literally cannot get past the front gate. Do not employ Rob Katter to try to get past the front gate in Pioneer and Mount Isa because I do not have the buy-in. That will take me a couple of years of engaging with families, getting to know them and getting them to trust me. I am sorry but I do not have faith in your people to be able to do that.

That is why one of our key policies that the KAP have stayed with for five years and have never deviated from is relocation sentencing. It is absolute madness to keep trying the same thing and expect a different result. You have probably heard it time and time again, but you are going to hear it again. Some kids are literally saying, 'I wanted to go to Cleveland.' There is no deterrent with breach of bail or whatever you like. A lot of these kids are not worried about breach of bail or anything. The highest consequence they can be given is going to Cleveland, where 100 or 150 kids congregate all in the one spot and they are coming out worse. They are all going to be put in the one spot and they are coming back worse. There is 95 per cent recidivism coming out of there. Clearly that is not working, but one of the parts of this solution has been to build two more of those centres.

We never deviated from this before we started getting these 95 per cent recidivism figures. We said that we needed a different form of sentencing—one that initially will provide a consequence for those kids. The magistrate will not be sending them to Cleveland for three months or six months. Instead, he will be saying, 'You're going to Urandangi out on the Northern Territory border,' or 'You're going to Kajabbi for 12 months.' That is a consequence. Do you know what the good news would be for everyone, especially the civil libertarians who say that the kid is the most important person, forgetting about the victims of the crime? The best chance we have to rehabilitate those kids is to force them out somewhere for 12 months where they can do the programs.

The answer I have heard repeatedly from ministers in the House and department heads who come to my office in Mount Isa is 'as long as it is evidence based'. That is a euphemism for never trying anything new. Let us do a pilot scheme then. That is not going to cost that much. It would be \$5 million or \$10 million tops to set up a remote camp akin to a mining camp in a remote area. There are various examples of this. Western Australia is already ahead of the game and is doing this. There have been many programs where kids are taken to remote centres. I have had personal experience with this seeing the worst of the worst kids out at, say, Urandangi State School. There was no security, no police, nothing; they just had a couple of good mentors out there and they were fine.

Do members know how much that cost the public? Nothing apart from the ordinary education budget. It was just a school, but the magic ingredient was that it was remote. It cleaned the kids right up. There were only 10 of them there, not 150, so they are not going to be there with their cousins, their brothers or their friends and there is a much better chance of splitting up family groups and friendship groups. If there were 10 or 20 of these around the state, we would be in a much better position to control this problem, rather than jamming them into another Cleveland detention centre.

There is another problem we have with this at the moment, and Shirley Marshall, a wonderful First Australian lady in Mount Isa, mentioned this to me. She walked into my electorate office and said, 'Robbie, some of these programs are all right but you've got to force the kids to get out there. We can't get the kids to go out there.' I said, 'That's exactly what I've been trying to say in parliament.' We need a legal instrument for the magistrate to be able to give a court order to say, 'That kid is going out there to that program.' Good luck if the program is put on in Mount Isa, because if you get past the front gate, as we said before, and then politely knock on the front door and say, 'Excuse me. Would Johnny like to come and attend our program?' guess what answer you will get. There are also still the blue card problems so we will not have half the right people there knocking on the gate or the door with the right input into engagement strategies. I am afraid you are going to be wasting your time until you can get a platform where you can really start to rehabilitate these kids. Plus it gives them that consequence up-front because they are not having the holiday at Cleveland. Instead, they are going somewhere else remote where they are likely to be split up from that group that can be a bad influence on them.

We are also talking about minimum sentencing. Adult crime—adult time. People have committed stabbings, murders, everything and they are looking at being back out on the street in three, four or five years' time. That is not acceptable to the community under any measure. You cannot just blame it on magistrates; you need to set some minimum standards. There is nothing wrong with matching minimum sentencing with an alternative form of sentencing. I think that would provide the best chance of ever turning these kids around. We can marry them up and have a happy marriage on both sides of the argument here where we are providing a real consequence plus providing that effective form of

rehabilitation. These are virtues backed up by Keith Hamburger who has been an activist in this space for a very long time. I am sure we would not agree on a lot of things, but there is benefit there. We need that minimum sentencing and relocation sentencing. They are very important and, I would say, the most critical elements of what you are missing right now, and this bill does not address it, so I feel you are wasting your time.