




Speech By  
**Robert Skelton**

**MEMBER FOR NICKLIN**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 March 2023

### **STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL**

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (3.55 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Palaszczuk government's Strengthening Community Safety Bill. Recently Queenslanders have been raising concerns about crime, and our government has listened. Under the Palaszczuk government Queensland has among the toughest youth justice laws in the nation, and this bill makes those laws even tougher. I will say that no amount of punishment stops crime; it is about early intervention. Youth crime is a complex and difficult issue to properly address. On one hand, the evidence clearly shows that the more time young people spend in custody or prison the more likely they are to commit further offences upon their release. However, this comes as very little relief to Queenslanders who are rightly concerned with keeping crime off our streets and keeping law-abiding Queenslanders safe. Indeed, in my own electorate of Nicklin my office is constantly receiving emails and phone calls from concerned members of the community asking what can be done about this complex and difficult issue. To all constituents who have contacted my office over the past few months, thank you. These changes to Queensland's youth crime legislation are in no small part the result of you all voicing your concerns. The reforms we will be voting on today are proof that we are all listening and we are acting.

The Strengthening Community Safety Bill targets the serious repeat youth offenders who are putting community safety at risk through a range of initiatives, including amending the Youth Justice Act. This bill extends the maximum period for conditional release orders from three to six months. Repeat offenders are more likely to serve their suspended term in detention if they breach a condition. This will also provide offenders with a greater opportunity to access and complete rehabilitation programs.

The bill will amend the Criminal Code to increase penalties for stolen vehicles. This includes: increasing the maximum penalty for unlawful use of a motor vehicle from seven to 10 years imprisonment; introducing a new circumstance of aggravation with a maximum penalty of 12 years imprisonment for unlawful use of a motor vehicle where the offender posts on social media bragging about their involvement in the offence; introducing new circumstances of aggravation with a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment for unlawful use of a motor vehicle if the offender is armed, in company or uses violence; and requiring offences of unlawful use of a motor vehicle with circumstances of aggravation or violence or threatened violence to be heard by a District Court judge or Children's Court judge.

The bill also amends the Youth Justice Act to require magistrates and judges to take into account the offender's criminal history when sentencing. The bill amends the Bail Act to make the breach of a bail condition a criminal offence for the first time this century. This is not to be confused with the consistent calls of those opposite to reinstate the former Youth Justice Act provision 59A. This section created a 'finding of guilt while on bail' offence, which was a fake offence that did not work. It did not allow young offenders to be punished for breaching a condition of bail. The majority of offenders did not spend any additional time in jail in connection with a finding of guilt while on bail.

It would be remiss of me not to thank our hardworking police and youth justice workers. I would like to make special mention of Senior Sergeant Gary Brayley, who is now retired, and his leadership in our community. As the OIC of Nambour Police Station over many years, the partnerships he helped forge with the community centre and local charity groups were key in engaging youth and sparing Nambour the worst of this insidious national problem.

There are serious issues in society with youth crime. We are talking about these repeat offenders who are emboldened and are bragging about these offences on social media. It is a scourge certainly and it needs to be stopped. One thing we have not spoken about is the other scourge in our community—that is, the scourge of extreme right-wing terrorism to the point where we now have people emboldened to kill innocent people for certain ideological beliefs. This is also emboldened by social media and elements of our community that give these people air.

This bill is the Palaszczuk government's answer to a complex and ongoing problem. I do not doubt that we will be debating this for years to come because crime never stops, but we do need to take action. We hope the bill achieves that. We are committed to ensuring that our community is safe and that serious repeat young offenders are held to account. I actually do think they should be held to account. I want to make special mention of the contributions from three of my colleagues which added a little different nuance to the debate and not so much of the argy-bargy—the member for Mansfield in her capacity as an educator, the member for Macalister in her capacity as a serving police officer and the member for Keppel with her testimonies from victims of crime in her electorate. I thank them. I commend this bill to the House.