




Speech By
Robert Skelton

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Record of Proceedings, 25 May 2023

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (3.19 pm): I rise to speak to the report of the Community Support and Services Committee on the inquiry into the decriminalisation of certain public offences. I would like to thank committee members and all those who participated in the inquiry process. These are difficult issues which affect the various communities across our great state in different ways so it was important that we looked at a wide range of views in order to strike the right balance.

This is a comprehensive report that reflects the opinions and concerns of various stakeholders, including community members, police and service providers. The report makes clear the recommendation is to repeal the offences of begging in a public place, being intoxicated in a public place and urinating in a public place from the Summary Offences Act 2005. However, I firmly agree with the committee's recommendation that this repeal should be subject to the availability of appropriate community-based diversion services. I acknowledge that the repeal of these offences may raise concerns about community safety. Therefore, the report recommends police retain the relevant powers to address aggressive and violent behaviour.

To divert vulnerable individuals experiencing chronic ill health, poverty or homelessness away from a possible punitive response, the report recommends investing in programs to establish or maintain non-custodial facilities for the care and treatment of intoxicated persons, which is essential to delivering on recommendations 79 to 91 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody handed down in 1991.

Through the inquiry the Queensland Police Service was directed to investigate tools used by police in other jurisdictions where these offences have been decriminalised. I believe that this would be a useful exercise to inform the best way forward for Queensland and present further opportunities for the QPS to develop its co-responder programs to better target more effective outcomes, as advised by the Public Advocate. The report also recommends providing cultural awareness training to all frontline workers responding to or providing services in connection to the offences under review and that those responding do so in a trauma informed way, reflective of any cultural sensitivities.

Where an individual is intoxicated but not acting in an aggressive or violent manner, the report encourages Queensland police to use discretion. Alternative powers should only be used when a person acts in an aggressive or violent manner. Police should also be authorised to transport an intoxicated person to a place of safety where there is no appropriate transport option. This is to ensure vulnerable individuals are taken care of and are not left at risk of harm.

Local governments should be encouraged to provide adequate public facilities across the state, with a particular focus on ensuring spiritual places of culture gatherings be provided with facilities such as shade, waste bins, seating, fresh drinking water and amenities. Community support organisations should be expanded to be available at times when Queensland's communities and individuals need them most to provide outreach services and health assessments on the ground.

Disadvantaged individuals often have complex and multiple support needs that require a flexible and integrated approach. Therefore, we need to develop multidisciplinary, culturally responsive and trauma informed support services alongside social housing and onsite supported accommodation.

This report also recognises diversionary centres can be an effective way to support individuals who are struggling with addiction and related issues so we need to ensure that they are appropriately located. Reframing the public conversation around abuse of alcohol to focus on health impacts and to encourage individuals to seek help moving away from a shame-based response would also be helpful in reducing instances of concern.

In conclusion, the committee's recommendations aim to strike a balance between community safety and the need to provide appropriate care and support to vulnerable individuals. We urge the Legislative Assembly to consider these recommendations carefully and take action where appropriate. I commend this report to the House.