




Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (3.41 pm): I rise to not oppose these laws, because they attempt to deal with one of the biggest issues on the minds of Queenslanders. We know that the number of serious repeat offenders—that small cohort we hear so much about—has increased from 10 per cent to 17 per cent in the 2021-22 financial year's data. I have heard lot of stories across my electorate of lives shattered by this government's failures in this space. My own neighbour in Parkwood had their car stolen, a lovely Toyota 86, by some young offenders who took it on a crime spree before dumping it on the Smith Street Motorway off-ramp.

I asked my community more broadly for their views on these issues. I had a great response and a respectful discussion, which does not always happen on Facebook. I start my contribution by turning my speech over to the people I represent to share some of their stories and ideas.

Firstly, Shane told me how he was king hit by a young offender while working in Surfers Paradise. His bicep was torn off the bone, he got a broken finger and he needed surgery, resulting in him taking months off work. The alleged offender was never caught and charged for what they did. Marco wants there to be a focus on prevention and early rehabilitation. In a familiar story, Vee told of how her house was broken into by the same young offender six weeks apart. Desmay believes that the impact of rent increases, power cost increases, food cost increases, medication cost increases, petrol price increases, everyday living expenses and the pressure this puts on families is part of the problem. She says that, despite the underlying challenges contributing to this, juveniles 'need to be accountable for their actions' so we need to 'address the parent or parents, too'.

A big issue I hear from locals is feeling unsafe on public transport. Whether that be catching the train to Brisbane from Helensvale, catching a tram into Surfers Paradise or taking a bus around Labrador, people just do not feel safe. That is a consistent story. I have seen it for myself: it can be pretty scary to catch a tram at night. Our police and our G:Link staff do a really great job and I support them having as many resources as possible. Hopefully that will be covered in legislation we debate at the next sittings.

A couple of the private responses I received from locals included from one person who works at the Southport courts who said, 'It's tough seeing members of youth gangs hanging around train stations, especially Helensvale, committing serious assaults and robberies on unsuspecting citizens and being given a slap on the wrist. I personally believe it's because of the legislation and the lack of power our judicial officers have.'

Another private response was from a mum who told how her 14-year-old daughter was recently assaulted by another student. She was punched in the back of the head and left with extensive damage to her mouth, lip and jaw as well as a concussion. The student who allegedly attacked her was given a suspension, and then the school encouraged this mum to report the incident to the police. She said that this is where it became infuriating. They sat at the Southport Police Station for two hours before someone could see them. Because the police are struggling to fill positions and are not adequately

staffed, when they were seen there was no officer on duty who could take a statement from a minor. This mum was instead told that the school had done their job and that there was unlikely to be any further action. She told me that this shows that these kids know they are not going to face serious consequences. That is unacceptable in the light of other messaging about how 'one punch can kill' or how 'one moment can change a life'.

Lauren made a great point about better funding for out-of-home care. She said she would like to see reduced red tape between care providers and the relevant department. Jye similarly gave me input about early intervention—having better pathways to trade schools, fit-for-purpose school curriculums and increased mental health funding.

I am sorry to tell my constituents that what we have before us from the government is all about politics. It is all about trying to make the issue of youth crime go away. These laws have been botched from the very start. The Premier's announcement in late December, which included differences in penalties to what we have before us, showed that this is all about media management. The policy parameters for these changes were guided by the amount of text that can fit onto a Canva graphic. It was not about decreasing the number of young offenders and it certainly was not about victims. It was about making this issue go away for the Labor government. They do not care about solutions, and these reforms were rushed with very little consultation.

The Premier announced these changes just after Christmas to look like she was doing something and to release the pressure that the government was under. We found out what drove the Labor Party to bring this legislation to parliament from a cabinet leak reported in the *Guardian*. Through that article we learned the police minister logged onto Office 365 and put together a PowerPoint presentation for his cabinet colleagues. He needed to be as convincing as possible, because the government had previously voted against allowing an LNP amendment to make breach of bail an offence for juveniles—an amendment that is word for word what the government is putting forward in these new laws.

The police minister ran through his PowerPoint presentation in the cabinet room, and the media reports say that it was not a detailed presentation on evidence and that it certainly was not outlining stakeholder support for his proposal. What the police minister's PowerPoint talked about was the LNP. He proposed this giant backflip, to make breach of bail an offence, to ease the political pressure on the government from the LNP opposition. The article states—

Ryan brought slides to cabinet to make his point. One of his arguments to colleagues was that changing tack would neutralise attacks by the LNP.

It further said—

... the political point was made bluntly—the government needed a lever to release the pressure from media outlets and the state opposition ...

That is the low standard of public administration in Queensland. A serious and complex issue, which is devastating communities across our state, is not being tackled through detailed policy work, through evaluating outcomes. For the Labor Party, this is all about the politics. It is a sad state of affairs. It tells you all you need to know about this tired, eight-year-old Labor government. They exist just to exist. Their sole focus is remaining in power for the sake of it.

Young people are suffering because of this. They are being failed at both ends of the system. The government's approach to early intervention is not working. Despite hundreds of millions of dollars—over a billion dollars, the Premier keeps saying—none of it is working.

To conclude, I want to make special mention of two programs in my area which are working and which provide proven models of housing and education. First there is the Gold Coast Youth Foyer in Southport which is run by the Gold Coast Youth Service. It provides a great model for 40 young people in my area by giving them a roof over their head. They pay a fixed proportion of their income—whether that is part of the welfare they are receiving or the work they are in—towards their rent. I thank the team there, who are led by Matt and Petrina. It has been an honour for me to be a mentor at the foyer for the last year and a bit.

The other service is the Men of Business Academy, or the 'MOB Academy', run by Marco on Nerang Street in Southport in the Southport electorate. I have the jump on the member for Southport to mention it before he does in the House today. For the last few years they have been running an amazing accredited school all about fitness and education and providing a good meal to these young men, giving them a pathway to work to get their lives back on track. I think they have about 60 to 70 students. It is so impressive what they have managed to achieve in such a short time. I really think it is a model that could be expanded and would have great success. Examples like this are gold standard early intervention, and that is the only way we are going to genuinely solve this issue.