




Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (4.18 pm): The Strengthening Community Safety Bill has been urgently rushed into parliament in response to escalating youth crime in Queensland with the incidents of stolen cars, dangerous driving, burnt-out vehicles, breaking and entering and home invasions escalating. Amongst horrendous offences were the devastating murder of a young mum in her home and the death of a family involving a stolen vehicle. Along with the rest of Queensland, the Noosa community and I mourned for them and their loved ones who, with many other victims, are suffering from our failings. How have we come to this point where we have young Australians perpetrating such horror?

The only way to assess this bill is whether and how it will create greater safety. I will not go through each of the 10 measures in detail as we have already heard that multiple times during the week. They include increasing penalties for car theft, extending breach of bail, the removal of the requirement to look at alternatives to arrest when contravening bail conditions and separate sentencing guidelines for repeat offenders.

I will, however, highlight some comments from submitters such as PeakCare Queensland, who said that there is no clear evidence that harsher punishments serve little or no deterrent value, and the Hub Community Legal Centre, who said that changing police obligations from 'must consider' to 'may consider' alternatives serves no useful purpose at all. The government's own statistics office said in its report on youth offending that these crimes are conducted by young people with less developed decision-making capabilities and poor impulse control and that they lack the understanding of the depth of consequences of their behaviour and are unlikely to respond to these changes.

Many times during this debate we have heard the importance of evidence-based decision-making; however, within the measures proposed, there appears little to no evidence that these changes will make a difference. Victims and their families are understandably frightened and fed up. My own community are also fed up from visiting youths stealing cars, endangering lives with dangerous driving on our beaches and alcohol fuelled violence. There is a lack of respect from this cohort. Submissions from victim support groups outline why they feel that government does not appear to care, with repeat offenders let back out to create trauma yet again.

In 2021 our Legal Affairs and Safety Committee travelled to areas that had been greatly impacted by this cohort of repeat offenders—roughly 10 per cent—who contribute to the majority of youth crime. For Mount Isa, I believe at the time it was around 50 youths. These are the ones who must be targeted; however, as we found, the complexities include an inability to comprehend consequences, requiring longer term solutions than cycling them through the prison system, which puts our communities at greater risk when they are released.

Through what they learn inside and who they connect with, this is especially relevant to those high percentages of youth who are believed to have fetal alcohol syndrome. There has not been any identified remedy for the portion of their brain that has been damaged before birth. The Queensland

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak Ltd acknowledges that there are a small number of young Indigenous who need to be detained for their and the community's safety; however, increased supports are required to rehabilitate.

Overall, we have a range of provisions in this bill that it is not clear will have any effect and a couple of provisions that may. Is this actually creating greater safety for our communities? According to Caxton Legal Centre, the answer is no. They stated—

There is no evidence in Queensland, Australia or overseas that 'tough on crime' measures improve community safety or that stronger punishments deter or rehabilitate, especially for young people who are to overcome by disordered thinking or neuro-underdevelopment.

Regardless of what has been provided that is evidence based, it is understandable that the frustrations from MPs have led to where we are today. We need to do something right now to ensure violent juvenile offenders do not further impact our communities. However, what about greater safety into the future when they are released? Katter's Australian Party has put forward previously that these repeat offenders need to be relocated at sentencing to remote properties where they cannot impact any further on their communities, to work and develop life skills whilst accessing assistance from programs such as On Country. I have supported this as they not only gain essential skills and self-esteem but also learn respect and self-reliance.

This potential fourth option for the courts—relocation sentencing—should not be relegated to the too-hard basket due to costs. The Atkinson report in 2018 stated that we are paying \$1,500 a day for imprisonment, which is more than adequate to fund initiatives that can be more effective in creating greater safety in the long term. These are not a boot camp as trialled previously, which has been mentioned as a failure in this chamber. However, when we looked into this, we found it was implemented in a hurry, had sporadic data and was shut down in the same hurry. Again, how can we make evidence-based decisions without appropriate evidence?

The statement of reservation I made in 2021 on the Youth Justice Bill outlined many issues that appear to remain, including the need for youth services and supervision after 5 pm and early assessment of offenders and their family environment from the very first court appearance—not, as we heard, the fifth or sixth. I table that statement of reservation.

Tabled paper: Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, statement of reservation by the member for Noosa, Ms Sandy Bolton MP [320](#).

Even though there is no clear indication that this bill will assist, except possibly in the immediacy, I will support it in deep frustration and desperation; however, I seek from the government that this will not be seen as the answer and that it will now work to develop longer term solutions, including trialling relocation sentencing, increasing efforts in addressing the contributors to crime and early identification in schools of children demonstrating criminal behaviours with age-appropriate response supports.

To finish, I thank the submitters and departmental staff who in rapid time responded to this bill. I understand the urgency; however, this issue has been raised for years in this chamber, as we did with housing and other matters. If MPs and their communities were listened to, there would have been ample time to develop a bill that incorporated addressing the environments these youths are emanating from, the alcohol addicted and violent households that they are often returned to and the much needed transitional accommodation required.

There are many nonviolent offenders, including increasing numbers of women, eligible for parole who remain incarcerated as they have nowhere to go. This is contributing to the overcrowding in prisons and a lack of capacity to rehabilitate. Communities across Queensland deserve much more than what this bill offers. I can only hope that there is some immediate relief while the government develops real solutions for this specific cohort that can guarantee greater safety now and into the future for Queenslanders based on evidence and not on hoping.