




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (12.24 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023. The amendments in the bill, along with our \$332 million investment into youth justice programs and police initiatives, send a clear message to all Queenslanders that this government is committed to not only strengthening our laws by ensuring there are consequences for young offenders but also tackling the complex causes of youth crime. Because if we can prevent this crime from happening, that is how we best keep the community safe.

We are committed to reducing reoffending behaviour among children and to delivering evidence-based interventions that address a young person's individual risks and needs, because intervening early is proven to help break the cycle of reoffending. Last week the Queensland Sentencing and Advisory Council released a report examining the sentences of children under the age of 14. Significantly, since 2018 the number of children under 14 years who have been sentenced has decreased by 35 per cent. The continuing decline in young people being sentenced in the Childrens Court reflects the success of our diversionary options. There is, however, a small but high-impact number of young people who have ongoing contact with the criminal justice system, and youth justice resources must be targeted at these serious repeat offenders.

Strengthening our youth justice framework requires stronger bail laws, making it an offence for a child to breach a condition of their bail undertaking. This will mean that, like adults, children can be charged with an offence if they breach a condition of their bail and courts will be able to impose a penalty, including a detention order, for a child convicted of that offence. If a child is not complying with their bail conditions and disengaging from court ordered support, that means there is now more opportunity to intervene early to ensure we can take action before the child reoffends.

The bill increases the maximum penalty for the offence of unlawful use and possession of a motor vehicle, aircraft or vessel from seven to 10 years imprisonment. The bill also proposes the creation of a new circumstance of aggravation for unlawful use, with the maximum penalty for these circumstances up to 14 years. I note there has been some criticism from those opposite that the maximum penalty for children is not the same as for adults. That has always been the case. I am not sure why the opposition is now suddenly surprised.

Mr Power: It's what's in the report.

Ms FENTIMAN: It is in the committee's report; I take the interjection. What this means is if there is serious aggravated offending for unlawful use of a motor vehicle—

Mr Crisafulli interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will cease his interjection. Pause the clock. Members, we will have no cross-chamber arguments. I am going to start warning people.

Ms FENTIMAN: What this means is if there is serious aggravating offending it is now seven years for unlawful use of a motor vehicle. For robbery, if there is a weapon or they are in company, it is 10 years or more if it is particularly heinous. These are significant increases. Judges and magistrates are required to consider increases in the maximum penalty when determining the appropriate sentence. If those opposite were more interested in the legislation and what was in the committee report rather than going around talking about things that failed when they were in government like boot camps, maybe they would not be surprised. I would love to hear more about how they think bringing back boot camps would work.

The LNP have circulated amendments seeking to remove the principle that detention be a last resort. Let me be clear. This is a longstanding principle in place in every Australian state and territory and is part of international law. It does not mean that young people are never given detention. We just heard from the shadow police minister about the Childrens Court and the sentences that they are giving. If those options are not considered suitable, then detention is ordered. The government is about targeting the small cohort of serious repeat offenders who commit serious crimes. We are requiring that, when the court sentences those serious repeat offenders, it must put victims centre and the primary consideration must be community protection and safety. That is what is going to get better outcomes.

We are also building on our \$800 million investment in responding to youth crime and tackling its complex causes. As the chair of the Economics and Governance Committee noted in his foreword—

... it is important to not see this Bill in isolation, but to recognise that a variety of other steps are being taken simultaneously.

We are funding a \$14.8 million fast-track sentencing pilot that will ensure faster finalisation of matters so young people are spending less time on remand and more time serving their sentences and completing programs.

Young people who are serious repeat offenders require specialist intensive and dedicated resources to manage their offending behaviour. Intensive case management has been purposefully designed to address these factors that impact on chronic juvenile offending. It is incredibly effective. Last month the Nous Group released its evaluation of intensive case management and reported that: 40 per cent of children who completed their intensive case management have not reoffended at all—some for over three years; the six-month reoffending count was reduced by 51 per cent; and there was a reduction of 72 per cent in the proportion of crimes against another person. This is actually how we keep the community safe. We know it works, and that is why we have committed a further \$30 million to extend and expand intensive case management to priority locations.

It is also recognised that First Nations children and young people are over-represented in our system. We must continue to support investments into initiatives that promote community-led approaches and stronger links between the young person and the community. That is why we are investing \$5 million over two years to establish community-led place-based justice reinvestment that will address the upstream and underlying causes of youth crime.

We are also providing funding of \$15 million over two years to be allocated to support place-based initiatives targeting prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation and reintegration. Other initiatives include: Street University, which provides a safe space for young people to engage in vocational and educational workshops; Midnight Basketball, which gives young people the opportunity to spend their Friday nights in a healthy, safe and fun environment; and On Country, a program that allows young people to spend time with elders and traditional owners to rebuild cultural knowledge.

The Palaszczuk government also recognises that being a victim of crime can be incredibly traumatic and life altering, and that is why the Premier has announced \$9 million of additional funding to Victims Assist. This will ensure that victims of violent crimes receive timely assistance and support to help them recover from the physical and psychological impacts of crime and to make sure they feel heard and supported in the criminal justice system. I acknowledge the committee's comments in the report that the Victims of Crime Assistance Act should be reviewed with a view to considering enhancements to the act. As the Premier has announced today, we will be accepting those comments and referring that to the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to supporting victims and is currently working with relevant stakeholders to implement a victims commissioner. This was a recommendation from the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, and I am looking forward to continuing those discussions with the community and stakeholders about establishing a victims commissioner here in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.