



Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Record of Proceedings, 19 April 2023

MOTION: YOUTH CRIME

Mr ANDREW (Mirani—PHON) (5.12 pm): I was going to go through some of the statistics that we have on crime but first I will touch briefly on a story that a 21-year-old tribal girl told me at the airport. She said that the people who live next door to her have a 13-year-old boy who had been stealing cars and reoffending. When the police dropped him home his father met them out the front. His father gave the boy a serve and was going to give him the boot. The police took the father away and left the boy there. Pick that one up! I could not believe it. She said, 'Steve, that young fella has been in trouble the whole time and this is what we are dealing with.' The kid was left unsupervised and the father was taken away to jail for trying to chastise his own child because the kid had just rolled a car and almost killed someone on the highway.

There is absolutely no point in having tough laws if they are not being applied. And why would they be? Hundreds of pages of sentencing guidelines written by the former attorney-general clearly direct judges not to send juveniles to prison. Believe me: I sympathise with the concept that the rights of young offenders need to be protected. However, don't non-offending children have rights as well? They have the right to feel safe in their homes. They have the right not to have their homes invaded. They have the right not to be attacked or robbed at night. They have the right to safety and the right to expect justice. In recent years thousands of child victims have been left traumatised by youth crime. Many of them have gone on to discover that the court and the government do not actually care about them or their trauma as offenders are rarely subjected to any real punishment. What kind of message does that send to child victims? It is no wonder that many of them now have no faith in Queensland's criminal justice system.

Unless the government is prepared to legislate minimum sentences then we are basically wasting our time with tough sentencing laws. That is why I support the motion's proposal for a mandatory minimum sentence of 12 months for youth offenders convicted of—

Ms BOYD: Mr Acting Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I refer to the motion that has been circulated in the name of the member for Traeger. I believe that you have already made a ruling that the first paragraph be deleted. The member for Mirani is specifically speaking to the first paragraph. I ask for your ruling on this matter.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: I was giving some advice to another member. I will take some advice from the Clerk. Member, earlier the first part of the motion was ruled out of order and the motion has been rewritten. As per my earlier ruling, you can reference it in the broader context of the issue but you cannot speak directly to that part of the motion. Both the Clerk and I were advising other members. I will listen carefully. I ask you to continue your contribution.

Mr ANDREW: Thank you for your guidance, Mr Acting Speaker. I also support the motion's proposal for relocation sentencing programs to be seriously explored. Putting young people in prison just makes them better criminals. Alternatives such as relocation programs would send young offenders to remote areas with excellent facilities where they would be given a real chance of turning their lives around.

The police do a fantastic job, but they are understaffed and under-resourced. One of the government's 2020 election promises was to hire an extra 2,024 police personnel, including 1,450 officers by 2025. From July 2020 to 31 October 2022 an extra 401 officers were hired, leaving 1,000 more officer positions to be filled in order to honour that commitment. The whole policing sector has become thoroughly demoralised and the police are sick of having their hands tied when trying to curb youth crime. Over the past few years, significant feedback from regional public hearings and submissions clearly shows that the current sentencing by the Queensland courts has not met community expectations.

The options set out in the motion are not just about getting tough on crime; they are a plan of action for responding to a small group of young offenders who engage in persistent and serious offending, that is, the 17 per cent of serious repeat offenders who commit 50 per cent of the youth crime in Queensland. All Queenslanders have a right to feel safe in their homes and in their communities, no matter where they live. The young people who commit offences must be held accountable for their actions and the impact of those actions on their victims, their families and the broader community. I do support the motion.

I would like to touch on something that is allowing this to continue. In my electorate some of our police stations are not 24-hour policing branches, for instance, the Mount Morgan station. Marlborough has 1,000 itinerant workers who come to work at the wind farms but it does not have a 24-hour station either. It needs two police officers. I will speak to the minister again. I have spoken to him earlier. They need more policing, they need more resources and they need more infrastructure to house those resources. Sarina is another example.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Member, I ask you to come back to the substance of the motion.

Mr ANDREW: This relates to the motion because when towns do not have 24-hour policing crime goes unchecked. The minute the police station shuts its doors the drug deals start. People form gangs. They gather outside the pubs to bum smokes off people. They make people's lives hell. They go into businesses and give the staff hell. I have seen it all. Many business owners have complained to me about this. Some have reached the point where they have shut up shop until the young people's witching hour passes. Some shop owners have even tried to give those kids jobs sweeping and the like, basically to pay them to stop committing offences and demoralising local people and tourists. It is a sad state of affairs and we need to get on top of it.