




Speech By
Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (12.55 pm): This arrogant and out-of-touch Labor government is taking Queenslanders for granted. Weak on crime and hopeless on the causes of youth crime, this Labor government is failing Queensland families in so many ways. It is increasing the cost of living with an ever-expanding list of new taxes like the patients tax it tried to impose on GPs, which would have made a visit to the GP more expensive, the renters tax it backflipped on or the punters tax it imposed on the simple pleasure of putting a bet on a race.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Clearly the member is not addressing the bill before the House. I ask him to come back to what we are actually debating.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): I ask you to return to the long title of the bill.


Mr NICHOLLS: Indeed. When it comes to youth justice Labor failures are legendary, like its failures to provide adequate medical and health services, including maternity units, in regional and remote Queensland where it is also failing Queenslanders, or the secrecy and confusion over the ever-expanding list of wasteful and expensive over-budget projects. Over and above these and all the other failures that I have mentioned, the out-of-touch Labor government is failing in its most basic and fundamental obligation to protect Queensland families and businesses from the scourge of crime being experienced in towns and cities the length and breadth of Queensland.

It is a failure that started in 2016 with the systemic weakening of LNP laws designed to protect Queenslanders—and they were working. Statistics prove that there are far more young offenders because of the ALP government's changes. The Government Statistician's 2019-20 report highlights the total number of young offenders since 2020, and it is revealing. In 2011-12, the first year of an LNP government, the reduction in young offenders was 175 and every year thereafter till 2014-15 the number of young offenders decreased. However, here it is, the first year of the Labor government; the number of young offenders increased by 393. It reached a peak in 2018-19 of 3,498 and in 2020-21 there was a total of 9,749 offenders; that is almost 2½ thousand more than the 2014-15 year. I table a chart showing just how abject Labor's failure has been.

Tabled paper: Document, undated, titled 'Under Labor youth criminal offences are soaring: Queenslanders deserve better' [288](#).

Of the offences, 45.8 per cent were for robbery, unlawful entry and theft and deception. These figures put the sword to the Premier's claim this morning about youth justice. Under the LNP the laws were working and crime was down. Under Labor crime is up. It is a failure that all too sadly has led to far too many deaths and injuries for both victims and young people. There is a 17 per cent rate of recidivism, up from 10 per cent a year ago—and we just heard the youth justice minister brush over the top of it as if it was a nothing. That is not a seven per cent increase; that is a 70 per cent increase in youth justice recidivist offenders since June 2022 after the government's last attempt in 2021 to address youth crime. It was after they made those changes.

Over the past 12 months, car thefts in Townsville totalled 1,181 and in Cairns they totalled 1,182. That is 100 cars a month—three a day—being stolen in each of those two cities. In my own electorate of Clayfield, juvenile offending has spiked from just over 210 offences each month, which is bad enough, in August, September and October 2022 to over 320 per month in November and December with a slight reduction in January 2023. It is no wonder more than 2,000 people, frustrated with this Labor government's failures, signed an e-petition that I sponsored calling for breach of bail to be an offence—a petition promoted on the local community Facebook page and presented just this morning. The experience is similar in the youth justice minister's electorate of Nudgee, which is just next door to mine.

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (2.56 pm), continuing: Before the lunch break I was relaying the issues in relation to my seat of Clayfield and saying that the experience is similar next door in the youth justice minister's electorate of Nudgee. In fact, Clayfield and Nudgee are two of the areas with the highest levels of youth crime. It is no wonder when, at the beginning of February this year, the Hendra division was actually under strength by nine officers. If a government is measured by its willingness and its ability to protect its law-abiding citizens then this Labor government clearly fails to measure up and Queenslanders are paying the price.

The LNP will support this bill. At least this time it includes the LNP's breach of bail amendment—exactly the same wording as the amendment my friend the member for Burdekin moved in April 2021. That support does not mean the uncritical acceptance or the fawning obeisance that we will no doubt hear from Labor members. We have also offered an amendment to give courts the capacity to deal with youth offenders in the manner that the court thinks best. We support the magistrates and judges, unlike those opposite, including the Premier and the Deputy Premier who have both shamefully sought to shift blame for their own failed policies onto the judicial officers whose duty it is to apply the law and who cannot defend themselves.

My fear is that this bill and this government's actions will still not solve the problem of youth crime. That is because we know this Labor government's heart is not in these laws. This government does not really believe in this latest plan and it does not really believe in the solution it is trying to sell Queenslanders.

How do we know this? Clearly, these laws are not what the Premier promised Queenslanders on 29 December last year in her media release. Let us have a look at that. 'Increasing the maximum penalty for stealing a car,' screams bolded headline. 'A more severe penalty of 14 years,' says the next. 'The increased penalties apply to adults as well as juvenile offenders,' says the press release. The only problem is they do not.

The government's statement of compatibility reveals the duplicity of the Premier and this government. On page 5 it clearly says, 'The size of the impact on children is reduced by important existing safeguards.' What are those safeguards? They are limitations. They are: one, Childrens Court magistrates can only impose a detention order for a maximum of one year; two, judges in the Childrens Court can only impose detention for a maximum of five years; and, three, the sentencing principles in the Youth Justice Act continue to apply, including detention as a last resort for the least amount of time possible. Labor's heart is not in these amendments. This is a political fix like all the other so-called plans and actions we have seen in the last eight years.

We have had four youth justice action plans with 26 points in total plus a 47-point youth justice strategy, all seemingly to no avail. Labor fails on early intervention as well. Take the case of a young girl who recently appeared in the Mount Isa courthouse in February. The case is reported as *Re Isla Johnson*. It is a pseudonym. Here is her story: Magistrate Mac Giolla Ri relates the story of her trials and tribulations and the fact that her life of youth crime began only after being placed in a government care home full of known juvenile property offenders; that is, she was placed there by the state. She stopped living with her mother because she and her siblings, all under eight, were often abandoned. When that happened, this 14-year-old girl had to look after herself and her siblings. She had no money or food. The relatives she lived with for a time were sent to prison for domestic violence. She then personally went to Child Safety to ask for help, and she went into the care of the department.

After going into care in September 2022 Isla had four different Child Safety caseworkers—four different caseworkers—one every six weeks. She was placed in a care home with girls who were known juvenile property offenders. Not unsurprisingly, she bonded with those girls. Not unsurprisingly, she started on a life of crime. Magistrate Mac Giolla Ri then acknowledged there was no space in youth detention centres in Queensland, and if he remanded Isla in custody she would be spending the time

while she was in custody in the Mount Isa watch house. That is no place for a 14-year-old girl who is missing her siblings to be sent while on bail. Given this failure, is it any wonder kids like Isla end up committing crime?

That is not a gold standard of early intervention designed to prevent juvenile crime; that is a failure of this government and it is guaranteed to increase juvenile crime. It is not going to fix it. Despite all the pleasant sounding words churned out on reams of paper from the department, the minister, the Premier and the Attorney-General, that is the reality of what happens in Mount Isa and that is the reality that is reported.

In conclusion, this legislation does not deliver what the Premier promised. It almost certainly will not improve community safety. While the government has finally begrudgingly adopted breach of bail as an offence, I suspect it is not because it wants to but because the force of public opinion was simply overwhelming. Labor does not really believe in these changes. Their heart is just not in it. We know that no one single action will change the course of youth justice, but we must unshackle the judiciary. We must ensure consequences for actions and do more at the earlier stages to help prevent young people like Isla becoming another statistic—a statistic we see all too frequently. When it comes to weakening our laws and failing at-risk kids there is only one guilty party, and that is the Labor Party.