




Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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## **MONITORING OF PLACES OF DETENTION (OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE) BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (11.39 am): I want to make a brief contribution to the Monitoring of Places of Detention (Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture) Bill 2022. In the definition, one of the detention areas that is spoken about is a watch house or a holding cell. This was of particular interest to me because the reason this protocol is being brought in is because the government will not let the sunshine in and will not be transparent around their watch houses. I table some letters dating back to 2018.

*Tabled paper:* Bundle of emails from the member for Toowoomba North, Mr Trevor Watts MP, regarding requests to visit Brisbane Watch House [675](#).

In those letters I tried to gain access to watch houses so we could see how they were performing in the state. I was denied access in a not dissimilar way to access being denied to the UN committee. This should be of great concern to people because when people have offended it is only right they should be incarcerated. However, that incarceration should meet the standards of our society. There is absolutely no doubt about that. I will table the report that was delivered some six or eight months after I tried to gain access. It was put together by *Four Corners* in relation to the watch houses, in particular the Brisbane Central Watch House, which was being used as a child detention facility.

*Tabled paper:* Article from ABC Investigations, dated 13 May 2019, titled 'The Watch House Files' [676](#).

There was a fair amount of denial that that is what was going on. If a committee such as the one proposed here had been in place, it had access and was able to look at those watch houses, it would have been very clear that those watch houses were being used inappropriately for the inappropriate detention of children in conditions that we would not want for anybody in Queensland.

How did we arrive at this place? We arrived at this place because of the chaos and crisis that was caused by the changes in the Youth Justice Act which then led to an overwhelming number of youth offenders having to be temporarily detained. Some of them were detained for extended periods; some of them were transported around the state. They would come from Mount Isa to Townsville to Brisbane, and they would find themselves in inappropriate facilities.

I am very interested in the bill and in making sure there is some transparency. I think it is a shame that some of that openness and transparency was unable to be vented by the opposition, which of course has the same job. The job is to make sure the executive government are acting in an appropriate way. In my opinion, during that time they were not acting in an appropriate way and they were trying to hide it. They were trying to hide a crisis. We knew that they were in chaos. We knew that there were a great deal of problems within the child safety portfolio, and the last thing they wanted to do was to air that. Having a party such as the UN come in and see some of the things going on would have been deeply embarrassing for the government. I can only assume that is the same reason I was denied access. Of course, once we all saw the *Four Corners* report things changed rapidly.

This government, which has caused the youth crime crisis, compounded that crisis by incarcerating these young people in conditions that were inappropriate for them. They were not getting support, nutrition, guidance or education. If the UN had seen that, it would have been damning of this government. It was clear that it was going on. The minister knew it was going on, and the minister knew that I knew it was going on. That is why I was not allowed to go in and have a look. That all blew up when a TV channel went in there and showed the video footage.

We should not be in that situation. There are bodies set up to monitor the openness and transparency of a government, even when it is in crisis. The government has caused the youth crime crisis and now it is chaotically trying to work out what it will do with these people. They are being put into inappropriate incarceration without the required support structures. The government is wondering why it is getting worse and denying the UN capacity to get in there by debating this bill much later than it should have been. It is also denying the opposition access to those watch houses.

The bill has some merit, and we definitely should not be afraid of being open and transparent. The only reason, in my opinion, that a government would find itself afraid of openness and transparency is that it has something to hide. Clearly, it was trying to hide the embarrassment that is the youth justice crisis. It is trying to hide the embarrassment of a complete lack of planning and lack of facilities as we saw 17-year-olds moved out of adult prisons and into the juvenile system. The bullying and intimidation that was going on by those near-adult offenders in the juvenile system—they were incarcerated with 12-year-olds—meant that there was great pressure on rooms. The solution was to put them in watch houses. If you are going to put people in watch houses, be open and transparent. Let people in to see what is going on. Let's make sure it is being done properly. These kids might have done the wrong thing, but they still deserve to be treated appropriately and receive the appropriate support, guidance and help.

I recently asked a question on notice. The response outlines that fewer than five juveniles have been incarcerated in the Toowoomba watch house for over 30 days. That prompts me to ask if that is because we do not have enough facilities.

**Mr Ryan:** Would you let them out?

**Mr WATTS:** No, Minister. I would not let them out. I would properly plan to ensure the facilities are appropriate and that there is appropriate monitoring and openness—not the chaos and crisis that was created by this government with its knee-jerk reactions. It is pursuing a particular agenda that means people in my community face the possibility of encountering in their front room someone holding a machete as they had been inappropriately incarcerated in a watch house and let out because the facilities do not exist. That is the responsibility of this police minister and the former attorney-general. They created the crime crisis that has been sweeping the state. Then they did not have the appropriate facilities to incarcerate people. Then they denied people access to see what was going on in those facilities because they knew it would be damning for them.

This bill will finally allow a small amount of sunlight to shine through the cracks of the windows. This government should be embarrassed by how it has treated incarcerated juveniles. We know that it is embarrassed by the legislation it brought forward because it is busy back-peddalling. We are not sure whether it is 'Blocker' or the unions telling the government that it has to back-pedal and move ministers around, but we know that there is chaos and crisis. We know that the unions are steering the ship. We know that the government is having a really tough time in the polls when it comes to the youth crime crisis.

We should have appropriate facilities being appropriately monitored to make sure the executive of government is not abusing its power. Clearly, that is what has been going on for some time when it comes to youth crime in this state and how we are treating youth criminals once they are incarcerated, in inappropriate conditions. The minister knows it, and he is squawking away over there because he is embarrassed. He tried to cover it up but he has been found out on repeated occasions—

**Mr RYAN:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. In addition to obviously misleading the House, I take personal offence at the remarks and ask for them to be withdrawn.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Martin): Minister for Toowoomba North, the minister has taken personal offence.

**Mr WATTS:** I withdraw. Openness and transparency are always going to be the cure when a government is in chaos and crisis. The people of Queensland need to see what is going on. In fact, the UN needs to be able to monitor what is going on. We need to have trusted bodies and trusted institutions that can look at inappropriate conditions and how they have been abused by the executive of

government to incarcerate our young people. I support the bill going forward and would encourage ministers in future to allow transparency so the opposition can do its job and hold the executive to account when it is failing, in chaos and crisis—

*(Time expired)*