




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2024

QUEENSLAND COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (5.01 pm): What a ridiculous contribution from the member for Currumbin, who said that this bill is being rushed through. The member knows that this bill builds upon six months of work from the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee, where the LNP tried to hide those recommendations for their own political narrative. We are getting on with the job of changing laws to make our community safer. I fully support the Queensland Community Safety Bill. I thank the committee for the work they have done. Indeed, it builds upon a lot of the work that our former select committee had done.

I cannot think how many times I have said in this place that sentencing should meet community expectations. In relation to youth crime, I expect, like my constituents, that there must be consequences for actions and offenders must be held to account. I remain determined to make change and more change in our laws to make our community safer—and that is what this bill does.

I have long lobbied for and have helped make successive changes to laws that have been passed in this place—before the member for Currumbin was even here—with bipartisan support, such as a real breach of bail offence with a real custodial sentence, unlike the Clayton's LNP breach of bail where they all reoffended. I have lobbied that community safety must be paramount for the judiciary in regard to sentencing of youth offenders. I have lobbied for a new clause for declaration of serious recidivist youth offenders who pose a risk to the community and to increase sentencing principles by the judiciary. I have made contributions in my electorate to enhance community safety through my role on the Community Support and Services Committee and my role as a local member. I will talk to those achievements a little later, but they are each unmatched by the LNP.

I want to get on with the main element of this bill—and it is one that I fully support. Clause 132 of the bill inserts a new principle 18 in the Youth Justice Act. We debated this quite a bit in the select committee, but it is here in this bill. I want to thank the committee for the work they have done. I thank the committee members and the member for Toohey for the work they have done on this. That clause says—

A child should be detained in custody—

- (a) where necessary, including to ensure community safety, and where other non-custodial measures of prevention and intervention would not be sufficient ...

I acknowledge that some submitters to the report formed the view that this amendment proposes a more restrictive test that could, in their view, lead to more young people in detention. With respect, and with reference to those views, they are not the views of the people in Thuringowa. They are not the views of my constituents who basically could not care less if more young people are locked up. To make our community safer, they want them in detention. It is their clear view—and it is repeated to me over and over when I meet with victims of crime—that these youth offenders should be removed from the community and placed in detention to make our community safer and that there must be consequences for action. I will talk about post-sentencing rehabilitation and everything we are doing at the front end as well.

For those serious, violent criminal offenders who are causing so much pain to our community, there must be consequences for actions. That is what this bill does. With the passing of this bill, our government is providing the courts with all the necessary tools in their toolbox to make decisions in the interests of community safety. The government's position is a strong position because it ensures clear guidance to the courts. The bill removes the reference to detention as a last resort and it reinforces that community safety must always be the critical consideration for the courts.

In relation to the opposition's comments about the amendments in the bill on principle 18, I note the committee's comment on page 13 of the report, which states—

The committee notes the position of several submitters that the amendments to principle 18 have the effect in the submitters' view of removing the principle of 'detention as a last resort' in its entirety.

The Queensland Police Union's submission stated—

The QPU is very supportive of this sensible approach. The Judiciary must now be on notice to get on with the job of locking up recidivist youth offenders who are committing increasingly violent and dangerous crimes in our community.

They went on to say—

This reframing on this vital issue should remove the legal loop hole that has allowed magistrates to keep these offenders in our community.

As I have said before, I have a track record in community safety and delivering more to Thuringowa, starting in 2016 when I picked up the work that the LNP had not done in their term of government. All they were interested in was hiding crime statistics. We have been completely transparent on that. They set up a rapid action patrol hub with only 20 staff. I did a night shift with them in 2016 and I asked what they needed. They said, 'Twenty more staff. It's not working.' They have 40-odd staff now in that rapid action patrol hub. That is what we do. Then in 2018 I delivered a brand new police station in the Upper Ross suburbs, taking their workforce from two officers to 10, the Kirwan station went from 54 to 90 officers, and I am building a brand new police facility in Thuringowa right now that will have the new academy.

Through strong and ongoing advocacy, I was instrumental in helping establish the Stronger Communities Early Action Group in Townsville, and I note that this model is being rolled out to other areas of the state because it brings all departments together to tackle the front end of crime. I also secured ongoing funding for Project Booyah; the Clontarf Foundation; the Stars academy; the Lighthouse; the after-hours youth engagement program for the Upper Ross—that is recurrent funding; the Indie School in Kirwan; Transition 2 Success; Silver Lining programs; and the Townsville Street University. I advocated to help deliver—and we have received thanks to Premier Miles—the new police helicopter, and we have the JT Academy. Each of these things is working in concert to help keep our communities safe.

Before I get to a couple of areas that make my blood boil—I am so glad there is a clause in this bill around emergency services—I say that our track record is in contrast to the LNP and their empty slogans. I implore one of the LNP members to get up and actually define what 'rolled gold' is. In the select committee we asked the experts what the gold standard was. They said, 'There is no definition.'

An opposition member: Yes, they did.

Mr HARPER: They said there is no definition. In the select committee they made it very clear that there is no definition. The LNP cannot define what 'adult crime, adult time' is. There is no definition. There is no detail. The LNP have a track record of sacking police, failed boot camps where they all reoffended, failed breach of bail where they all reoffended—a legacy of failure. What does the LNP stand for? Lightweight, nothing promises. They make false promises to try to fix what is a very complex problem. We are not waiting 100 days after the election to remove youth detention as a last resort. It is done! It is removed in this bill.

I want to congratulate the government for expanding Jack's Law to reduce offending in the knife crime area; for the introduction of new offences for criminal online material on social media; and for increasing maximum penalties with aggravating circumstances for a number of offences such as going armed so as to cause fear, dangerous operation of a motor vehicle, common assault, assaults occasioning bodily harm and burglary.

These are all significantly increased, but there is one thing that makes my blood boil. I have spoken to paramedics whose ambulance has been targeted by ridiculous fools driving stolen cars and placing people at risk. I have spoken personally to police officers who have been rammed. We have had fire emergency vehicles stolen in Townsville. But no more—there will now be a new offence. These vehicles respond to emergencies, but if they are rammed they become unoperational so the next ambulance going to someone who deserves one cannot get there. There needs to be consequences

for actions, so I completely agree with the new clause: 10 to 14 years for unlawful entry of an emergency vehicle; up to five years for wilful damage to an emergency vehicle; and 10 to 14 years for unlawful use of an emergency vehicle. This is what we need to do to make sure our emergency services are protected so they can get on with the job of responding to the community. This is a bill that I have been waiting for since we did the youth select committee, and we got there. I will ask the LNP to agree with the clauses. They know that by giving the tools to the courts and the judiciary we can make our communities safer. I commend the bill to the House.