




Speech By
Hon. Amanda Stoker

MEMBER FOR OODGEROO

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MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL

 **Hon. AJ STOKER** (Oodgeroo—LNP) (11.37 pm): I want to introduce you to Steve. He is a decent guy from Ormiston. He found himself on his way home from work the victim of an attempted carjacking on Finucane Road, one of the major arterial roads in my part of the world, at the hands of a young person. I had a householder from Cleveland tell me his horrific story of being woken in the middle of the night by the sound of young people breaking into both of his cars at once and having to chase a group of them down the street in an effort to keep them away from the family he wanted to protect. I have lost count of the number of older people who, after being repeatedly broken into, are now fearful to go to sleep in their home. So many people, more than I can recall now, have gone to sleep one night only to find their cars gone in the morning or their tools robbed from their work ute and they are unable to go about earning a living the following day.

One story that has really stuck with me is that of a family broken into on Christmas Eve last year. The young people caught on their home CCTV were organised and professional in their approach and carried machetes. The CCTV videos showed them in the children's bedrooms as the children slept. They stole all of the children's Christmas gifts, but what is more horrific is that they stole the peace of mind of that family. They do not sleep well anymore—not the mum, not the dad and definitely not the kids. The children have been begging their parents to be sent to boarding school, hoping that they will feel safer than they do at home. All of those feelings were compounded and made so much worse when the very same gang returned in the new year to do it all over again. I could keep going for the whole of my allocated time with examples—horrible stories of families broken, lives lost, injuries sustained, property stolen and destroyed, all by people who have, in a sense, been created by a system that provides no real, meaningful consequences for when they do the wrong thing.

The first duty of a government is to set the conditions for a safe community. It is the foundation on which everything else rests. If we do not get that right then we cannot build prosperity. If we do not get that right then people cannot build a business, cannot build a career and cannot seek justice in a wider sense in our community. None of those things are possible unless we have basic safety and order, balanced with the protections of a fair justice system.

What has become very clear is that the decision made a decade ago by those in the Labor Party to remove the mechanisms in the Youth Justice Act for there to be meaningful consequences for actions for those who break the law has created a dangerous group of people who really do consider themselves untouchable by the legal system. When I talk to the police officers in my local command they very plainly say that they know who the problem people are. They are a cohort of hardcore recidivist offenders who treat the law as a joke, who laugh as they walk out of court and who treat victims with contempt.

Perhaps perversely, those changes have incentivised organised crime groups to make the most of young people for the perpetration of the activities of their group, knowing that the justice system for them is a mere revolving door from which no real consequences flow. They have actually created an incentive for the recruitment and deployment of children to engage in this kind of behaviour. It has left

a trail of destruction in the lives of victims. It has even torn apart many families who desperately want a justice system that is capable of straightening out a wayward child but who cannot seem to get a meaningful consequence out of the system.

I accept that this has been a heightened debate in the chamber. I am prepared to accept that when those opposite watered down the laws many of them were well intentioned in doing so. Nobody likes the idea of having to penalise a young person. Everyone wants to be hopeful about what lies ahead for the individual in that situation. But, 10 years down the road, we now have an abundance of data that demonstrates that the policy they implemented has been an abject failure. In the 10 years since Labor changed the law there has been a 98 per cent increase in youth crime rates throughout Queensland. The number of serious repeat offenders has increased by 58 per cent in the last five years. In the 11 months of 2024 for which we have data there have been over 7,000 reported offences committed by young people in the South Brisbane region alone, which includes my part of the world. That is not even counting the cases where people are too scared to report or do not even bother reporting—they just go straight to their insurance company.

In Cleveland alone last year they had the highest crime rate numbers in over 24 years. I was horrified to look at the *Courier-Mail* crime map recently and see that the Redlands—this beautiful part of the world that I get to call home—is no longer the safe place that we like to think of it as. It was shaded in red, which tells us that crime has become a persistent problem.

It is simply wrong and plain foolish for those opposite to refuse to change course when it is clear the approach they had was not working. Let us go through what this bill will do—this commitment we have made to the people of Queensland at the election with the utmost transparency. Let us be up-front about what it is going to do. It will provide Adult Crime, Adult Time. Juvenile offenders who commit serious crimes like murder, manslaughter and grievous bodily harm will face the same penalty options as adults.

We are going to prioritise the rights of victims. The bill will amend the sentencing principles in the Youth Justice Act so that when we are sentencing a child offender the court must give primary regard to the impact of that offending on a victim. It is important that the rights of victims are prioritised over other factors when determining the appropriate sentence. The amendments also move to an opt-out model so that victims and their families have an automatic right to be kept informed of the process, unless of course that is not what they want. It is important they have access to information that is necessary for closure and for an understanding that they matter in this process. It is supposed to be setting the record right.

The courts will be empowered to review the full criminal history of offenders, including juvenile records, for up to five years when sentencing an adult offender. That is important because if a person is not turning their life around at that critical part in their life then they should be held accountable for the entirety of their course of behaviour rather than getting the opportunity to hide behind their record when younger. The bill provides that detainees will be transferred to adult custody after they turn 18. It will provide for media and victim access to what goes on in the Childrens Court to enhance transparency. Also importantly, there is a huge investment in early intervention and rehabilitation. This is not simply punitive. It comes with the wraparound services that are needed to give a person who has made bad choices in the past every chance and every help to craft a better life for the period ahead.

These laws should be passed. They put consequences for actions at the centre of the youth justice system but in a balanced way. It invests heavily in the lives of offenders to give them every chance to make better choices in their future, to wrap them in the services, training and support that is needed to help them turn the page in their lives. It is exactly what we promised the community. It is exactly what Queenslanders voted for at the last election. More than on any other topic, this government has a mandate to deliver this bill. There is no sensible reason those opposite should stand in the way of it.