




Speech By
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POLICE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; CORRECTIVE SERVICES (PROMOTING SAFETY) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (12.08 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Police Powers and Responsibilities and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 and the Corrective Services (Promoting Safety) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The bill amends Queensland statutes to provide safeguards to a person being searched by police by introducing a new framework that enables them to express a preference for the gender of the person conducting the search in the event the same gender starting point is not appropriate. The bill also provides for similar gender preferences in correctional facilities and medical and mental health clinic settings for the safety of patients, visitors and staff. In the police setting, the amendments also remove the ability for any police officer to view the monitor of a video camera in the area where a person is being searched.

The bill amends eight separate pieces of legislation that fall under the police, Attorney-General and health portfolios. Of those, the Child Protection (Offender Reporting and Offender Prohibition Order) Act and additional amendments to the Corrective Services Act 2006 are of particular interest to me in my current role. Proposed changes in the child protection space relate to offender reporting and the regular photographing of offenders to keep pace with identifying markings. Proposed changes to the Corrective Services Act include an increase in the Parole Board Queensland's discretion to extend the period of time between prisoner parole applications.

Week after week, year after year, I repeatedly raise the appalling state of police resourcing and Labor's failure in all areas of its duties to adequately protect Queenslanders from harm. I proudly stood in this place when Sian's Law was passed in 2021—a law that was borne of the Kingi family's petition that I tabled on their behalf and the 72,000 Queenslanders who supported our calls to change the law so that the worst of the worst offenders, like Sian's killer Barrie John Watts, remain behind bars. This law meant that Watts' application for parole has now been denied for another 10 years. To the Kingis, it meant a little justice that they might have a better chance of sleeping and may be able to breathe a little easier knowing that Sian's murderer will not be able to offend again while out on parole.

The new amendments to the Corrective Services Act 2006 contained in this bill extend this logic to a broader category of prisoners by proposing that a person may not make an application for parole without the consent of the Parole Board for the following periods: five years for a person sentenced to a term of life imprisonment, up from the current three years; three years for a person sentenced to a term of imprisonment of 10 years or more but not life; and 12 months for a person serving a term of imprisonment that is less than 10 years, up from six months. A number of committee submitters did not agree with these extensions and expressed concern about the additional strain on the prison system. I argue, as I am sure most Queenslanders would, that if there is no room in prisons to hold prisoners who remain a threat to the public then there is most certainly no room for those offenders in the community.

One of the cornerstones of the LNP's law and order policy is to rebalance the scales of justice to increase the rights and protections for victims. I take this opportunity to thank our brave corrective service and police officers who must accept that the systems they represent and defend are broken. Correctional facility failings, including in those that house young offenders, remain a debacle under Labor and are yet another piece in the law and order fiasco that will be their legacy.

The litmus test here is simple: do the amendments to both pieces of legislation help Queenslanders feel safe, feed their family and access health care? Do we have enough people in the right places to make a difference on the ground? The answer is a resounding no. Currently, the Queensland Police Service, the QPS, at least in major centres, ensures there are a number of male and female officers rostered on duty at watch houses so that search safeguards can be complied with. In their submission, the Queensland Police Union, the QPU, stated that:

... the proposed amendments are considerably loose and would allow the QPS to have a person who identifies as male search a person who identifies as female, simply because there is not an officer who identifies as female rostered on duty.

The absence of a definition of 'improper purpose' does not offer the protections the bill intends. The QPU submission states—

For example, the QPU recommends the expression 'improper purpose' include (a) a purpose designed to frustrate, prevent or unreasonably delay a search; and (b) a purpose to cause embarrassment or offence to an officer.

I note that, in the police minister's contribution and in some amendments that have just been tabled, there might be some amendments to these provisions. I will support them if they are in line with the QPU's request.

The bill proposes to strike out the ability for any police officer or authorised commissioned officer to view the monitor of a video camera in an area where a prisoner is searched. I share the QPU's concern that this provision increases the risk to police and it seeks safeguards for police from false claims of misconduct. The QPU believes there must be a clear recognition in the legislation that an officer, or an authorised searcher, may not disclose their own gender to the person being searched, nor can such officer be required to undertake a search if the officer themselves feels undertaking the search would make the officer uncomfortable or embarrassed. It must work both ways. What is good for the goose is good for the gander. This is where woke ideology gets us to some degree.

Like most initiatives in the law and order space by this government, the legislation does not come with appropriate resourcing and changes to the operational nature of policing. I can assure those opposite that the police feel that they are responsible for a number of complex issues inside the community, often without the laws or increased resourcing, plans or equipment to meet the expectations of the community. Therefore, it is no wonder attrition rates exceed recruitment, morale is at an all-time low and burnout is at extreme levels. We need only look at the lack of support for our police to gauge this government's appetite for real change.

My LNP colleagues and I, together with frontline officers, have repeatedly called on this government to address this shortfall. Police officer numbers have fallen well below historic police-to-population ratios. Without addressing this reality, other recent amendments to the CPOR bill will place approximately 1,700 extra reportable offenders on the register by 2028, taking the total to an estimated 5,722, making it even harder for the small number of CPOR officers who are already struggling to monitor these dangerous child sex offenders. Perhaps this government could start listening to frontline police, experts and maybe even the recommendations made by the CCC into Queensland's child protection offender reporting regime before making announcements that may sound good in a press release but fail to enhance law enforcement's ability to better protect our kids. With just four sitting weeks until the election—two of which will be consumed by balancing budget blowouts with election bribes—is this the best Labor can give Queenslanders?

The LNP know that we are fighting our biggest war on crime yet and that we are in the grips of a housing, health and cost-of-living crisis, yet time and time again Labor turn up to this place with nothing. They have nothing. They are out of touch. They have stopped listening. They have given up. Queenslanders are still begging for real reforms. They need to feel safe in their homes and their communities. This will not change under Labor. Queenslanders do not come first under Labor. The government repeatedly prove this in their pathetic attempts at meaningful consultation with anyone but their union mates. The union voice is the only voice they hear.

Anything to help attract police to join or remain in the fight for their communities is a plus. Rebalancing the scales of justice in favour of the victim and not the perpetrator is a must. Large sections of this bill prove that the government has wrong priorities and is not listening to Queenslanders about the issues that are of most concern to them. While there are obvious problems in these bills, their lofty attempts to appease everyone may in fact appease no-one. For the small improvements these bills make around the edges, I will not be opposing the bills.