




Speech By
Hon. Daniel Purdie

MEMBER FOR NINDERRY

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MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL

 **Hon. DG PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.06 pm): For more than 20 years I was privileged to serve my local community on the Sunshine Coast and throughout the wider Queensland community as a police officer. During that time I witnessed the extremes of human behaviour—from the best and most courageous to the worst and most depraved. From my first speech in this House I have articulated my firm view that the community deserves to be protected from lawlessness and criminal influences and that the most important role of government is to craft the laws and create the environment in which all Queenslanders are safe. I have never wavered from this belief. However, much to my regret, I have seen this obligation of government turned on its head as the interests of offenders are placed above those of victims and weak laws have emboldened offenders.

Further to the long list of innocent people who have lost their lives at the hands of violent juveniles, as outlined by the honourable member for Capalaba earlier today, each day reveals another attack on individuals and families and their property. This is the legacy Labor has left the people of Queensland. It is virtually impossible to imagine that nearly 10 years after Labor came to office we are correcting the litany of mistakes, omissions and miscalculations that characterise their time in government. Labor's record on youth crime is abysmal. It represents one of the greatest failings in the administration of justice that we have seen in this state. Wilful blindness was heaped on a manic desire to play to Labor's supporter gallery. There was no careful consideration of policy alternatives, there was no evaluation of outcomes and there was no regard for those with the greatest stake in the process: victims.

Labor had a two-pronged approach to the youth crime crisis. They believed no such problem existed or, alternatively, they attempted to simply wish the problem away. Their words were never backed up with actions and they foolishly thought Queenslanders would think they were actually doing something. Labor's record is a sorry catalogue of neglect, refusal to accept reality and a blatant disregard for the interests of the majority of Queenslanders. What is most disturbing is that those responsible for Labor's pathetic response—those who sat around the cabinet table with premiers Palaszczuk and Miles and moulded these policies and watered down strong laws with pride—remain in positions of influence. Earlier tonight some of those rose to lecture us on crime. At the same time, the opposition benches were populated by members who unquestionably supported Labor's laws and never raised a whimper as their constituents' rights were placed below those of offenders.

This House would not be debating this legislation today if Labor had not failed in its obligation to the people of Queensland from the very first day it assumed office. From its election in 2015 Labor proudly embarked on the unravelling of laws designed to combat youth crime. In 2015-16 the Palaszczuk government introduced a raft of legislative changes that would have dire consequences for so many Queenslanders. They removed breach of bail as an offence, reinstated the principle of detention as a last resort, reinstated the principle that having offenders remain in the community was a preferable sentencing option, and closed the Childrens Court to keep out victims and the media. It should not be forgotten that Labor's inclusion of 17-year-olds in the Youth Justice Act created the

children in watch house crisis. There were no children in watch houses in 2017; by 2019 there were approximately 100. This is another legacy of Labor's failed policies. I was surprised when earlier this evening the minister responsible for creating the kids in watch house crisis lectured us about modelling on youth detention facilities and watch houses.

It was not long before even the most biased Labor advocate realised that something more needed to be done as the seeds of the youth crime crisis began to sprout. Labor's answer was another plan: *Working Together, Changing the Story—Youth Justice Strategy 2019-2023*. The title said everything. For Labor, changing the story was all that was required. If they got away with simply spinning another yarn, that was better than taking positive action and responding to the growing crisis. For Labor it was never more than a story. Two years later more changes were introduced. The charter of youth justice principles was amended to include a reference to the community being protected from recidivist young offenders. This was a mere six years after Labor's groundbreaking amendments were introduced. Did no Labor member ever stop to ask the question: if their 2015-16 amendments were so good, why did they have to undertake so many rewrites and revisions? If their earlier amendments were evidence based, why was it that in the cold, hard light of day the evidence did not stack up? However, Labor's catalogue of failures did not end there.

In 2023 the Strengthening Community Safety Bill was introduced to combat motor vehicle theft and the actions of serious repeat offenders. That still was not sufficient to combat the outbreak of crime throughout so many Queensland communities. Just over six months ago Labor introduced the Queensland Community Safety Bill simply because its previous planned strategies and changes had not worked. On 22 August this year the then premier made an extraordinary admission. He said—

That's why I developed the Community Safety Plan in partnership with the Police Minister and new Police Commissioner, to tackle the root causes of crime, and implemented reforms to continue to give police the tools and laws they need.

What had Labor been doing for over nine years if it suddenly realised it had to tackle the root causes of crime? If this statement is true, why had Labor not been giving police the tools and laws they needed? The answers to these questions are simple: Labor never believed what it was doing was correct and its actions were little more than a tactic to draw people's attention away from the growing crime crisis. For Labor, activity was a substitute for achievement. The lamentable catalogue of Labor's failures brought us to the position we find ourselves in today. More than 50,000 youth crime offences have been recorded so far this year with a total of 400 serious repeat youth offenders. Only last Sunday Associate Professor Terry Goldsworthy from Bond University wrote—

To say that Queensland is experiencing a crime crisis is a fact. QPS data shows that the Queensland crime rate has in fact been rising since 2021. In 2023 the crime rate was the highest it has been for 20 years.

There can be no clearer proof that Labor's weak laws helped create a cohort of offenders who regard themselves as untouchable, beyond the reach of the law and free from significant legal sanction. Labor's catch and release policy has failed, and it is honest Queenslanders who have been forced to pay the price for its failures. Over the past four years we have crafted a legislative response to the disaster Labor left behind. Members of the then opposition and I travelled throughout the length and breadth of the state talking to Queenslanders about the impact of crime on their communities. It made little difference where we went because the message was the same: crime was out of control, there were no significant consequences for criminal behaviour, and the rights of victims had gone to the end of the queue.

It is from these discussions that this legislation, the Making Queensland Safer Bill, has been formulated. The bill reaffirms our commitment to significant law reform to ensure that, amongst other things: proceedings of the Childrens Court are open and that victims, relatives of victims, persons with a proper interest in the proceedings and the media are not excluded from hearings; youth offenders charged with serious violent offences can be charged as adults; the principle of detention as a last resort is removed; consideration is given to the impacts of offending on victims; it enhances consideration given to a person's criminal history; and an opt-out mechanism applies for victims on the victim information register.

This bill fulfils our commitment to have new laws in operation at the earliest opportunity. The Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee, in delivering its report on this bill last week, deserves to be thanked by the House. It responded with a careful consideration and argued assessment of the bill and its contents. It is to be congratulated on the report it has produced. Similarly, the Attorney-General and the Minister for Youth Justice are to be congratulated for their work on the bill. Through a sustained period of consultation we have sought to give effect to the wishes of the Queensland people. For too long they have been used as a punching bag for Labor's failed legal and social experiments. They have seen offenders' rights take precedence over those of victims and they have seen countless communities terrorised by criminals. This legislation will put a halt to the weak

approach that has characterised the past decade of maladministration and ineffective laws. With the other initiatives around early intervention and rehabilitation, coupled with more police on the beat, we have plotted a course that will reform this state's approach to youth justice. This bill is the first step on the path and deserves the support of the entire House.