




Speech By
David Lee

MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL

 **Mr LEE** (Hervey Bay—LNP) (10.08 pm): I rise to speak and make a modest contribution to the Making Queensland Safer Bill. The Crisafulli government makes no apologies for delivering on our commitment to Queenslanders that Adult Crime, Adult Time will be law by Christmas. These laws are tough but Queenslanders have backed them. They have backed the Crisafulli government to take strong action to end the youth crime crisis terrorising communities across our state. My electorate of Hervey Bay has not been and is not quarantined from the challenges and devastating effects of youth crime in our community. Over the last four years or so, as I have regularly engaged with our community, I have seen up close and personal the destructive impact of youth crime on the financial, psychological and physical wellbeing of our small business owners and vulnerable members in our community.

In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, many of our small businesses have furthermore experienced the destructive economic costs of youth crime: rising insurance premiums, the costly replacement of stock, temporarily standing down employees after break and enters, increased security costs and so on. We all remember Labor's five-word slogan: 'Keeping us safe and strong'. Well, the former Labor member for Hervey Bay made a hasty retreat from keeping us safe and strong when youth crime became a problem in our community. Many in our Hervey Bay community are hardly feeling safe and strong.

Whilst on the Fraser Coast Regional Council I instigated a crime prevention through environmental design audit and a small business and community organisations crime prevention workshop. The previous member for Hervey Bay was a no-show. It is this type of disengagement by Labor that has given rise to our youth crime crisis. Only the LNP has the right priority in making our community safer because we have been listening and engaged with our communities.

Our Making Queensland Safer Bill will amend the Youth Justice Act to make young offenders who commit offences, particularly serious offences, accountable by ensuring that courts have proper regard to the impact of youth offending on victims and impose the appropriate penalties that meet community expectations. This bill will remove detention as a last resort from the sentencing principles and make serious young offenders more accountable for their offending. There is much talk from those opposite about the best interests of the young offenders yet little apparent concern for the best interests of victims, their families and the wider community.

Deterrence is a well-established sentencing principle designed to discourage offenders from committing serious crimes by threatening or applying a criminal sanction. According to a 2024 Queensland audit report, there has been a 64 per cent increase in the average daily number of serious repeat offenders since 2019. Labor's weak laws and a decade of chaos have given rise to a generation of untouchables who have been immunised from the consequences of their crimes because there is simply no deterrence. This is a generation of young offenders who are cognisant of the fact that the scales of Lady Justice have been unequally and unfairly skewed or weighted to their advantage. Our

Making Queensland Safer Bill will recalibrate the scales of Lady Justice to ensure that the rights of victims are actively considered in sentencing. Our Making Queensland Safer Bill will provide for equality, transparency and fairness in the administration of justice.

This bill provides that a new principle will be included in the charter of youth justice principles specifically recognising the impact of offending on the victim. It means that the court must have proper regard in sentencing a young offender to the impact of the offending on the victim. This bill recognises the rights of victims as being at the forefront of the youth justice system and that there must be open justice and public confidence in our justice system. Young offenders who commit serious crimes will be held accountable for their actions and the harm that they cause to victims, and our courts will be able to impose appropriate penalties that meet community expectations.

We talk a lot about youth crime statistics. Behind the chilling statistics are victims and their families. They are not numbers. They are human beings with families and connections to our community: Jayden, Lauren, Chris, Paul, Justin, Nate, Karl, Cheryl, Aggie, Kim and so on—all small business owners in our Hervey Bay community.

Youth crime in Hervey Bay and our region has devastated our community. We are mournfully mindful of that tragic crime in Maryborough that snatched away the lives of Michale Chandler, Kelsie Davies and Sheree Robertson involving a 13-year-old offender. We are also sadly mindful of the death of Scott Cabrie from Toogoom, a part-time radio announcer and rideshare driver. Labor's weak youth justice laws also mean that a young offender's criminal history was inadmissible in sentencing an offender. Our Making Queensland Safer Bill will provide for a new definition of a child's criminal history to include cautions, restorative justice agreements and contraventions of a supervised release order. This will be admissible only in sentencing and admissible when sentencing as an adult, with a limitation of five years from the date of the outcome for the last childhood offence.

In Hervey Bay I know of one small business owner who sat through three restorative justice agreements, each of these with the same young offender. Our bill will provide a complete picture of the offender's history so that a judge can structure appropriate sentencing in line with community expectations. The court inevitably determines what weight to give to the criminal history of an offender, and our bill does not constrain a judge's general discretion in sentencing. Nevertheless, a young offender's criminal history will now be a factor of relevance in determining a sentence.

Those opposite are in denial and have been missing in action when it comes to tackling the issue of the youth crime crisis. Their default position was: 'It's a media beat-up.' They adopted the proverbial 'ignorance is bliss', hoping that by not talking about youth crime it would somehow make it all go away. This obstinate refusal of Queensland Labor to listen to our community has resulted in the rights of young offenders disproportionately prevailing over the rights of victims. The LNP has listened and is listening to our community. We are united in standing up for the rights of victims.

The tough provisions contained in the bill complement our LNP plans for gold standard early intervention and crime prevention programs throughout Queensland to ensure there are fewer victims of crime. There is \$50 million to be invested into nine regional reset programs, including the Fraser Coast. These early intervention residential programs will provide 24/7 intensive support for at-risk young people who require a higher level of care than some community-based organisations can provide. These will be short-stay one- to three-week programs. A young person can be referred to the service from school, police, Child Safety or parents. These programs will be delivered.

We have one great regional reset early intervention program on the Fraser Coast and it is called Operation Hard Yakka. I have been attending their graduations for five years. This is the type of gold standard early intervention reset program contemplated in our Making Queensland Safer Laws. The former Labor members for Maryborough and Hervey Bay were repeatedly invited to attend the graduations but they boycotted these events. Shame on them. It was Labor who weakened Queensland youth justice laws in 2016 and has consistently declared the youth crime crisis as a media beat-up.

(Time expired)