




Speech By
Hon. Di Farmer

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

Record of Proceedings, 13 February 2024

**SUMMARY OFFENCES (PREVENTION OF KNIFE CRIME) AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. DE FARMER** (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Youth Justice) (3.21 pm): I rise to speak to the Summary Offences (Prevention of Knife Crime) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I begin by acknowledging the tragic death of Mrs Vyleen White and I pay my respects to her family. It is inconceivable to all of us that this should happen to someone as they are going about their business. We send our deepest thoughts to her family. I want to commend all the people working at Redbank Plains for putting their arms around the community and helping people heal.

I also want to acknowledge Brett and Belinda Beasley, who are in the gallery today, for all the work they have done to bring us to this point already with the passing of Jack's Law last year. I can only imagine how hard it is to be sitting in the gallery as we speak about knife related crime again, reminding them of what happened to their beloved Jack. I am very much looking forward to meeting Belinda and Brett this week so we can talk about the foundation and how we can support the foundation even more.

This bill goes to the heart of Jack's death and Mrs White's death. It goes to the fundamental principle that we all hold to—that we all should feel safe in our homes and that we all should feel safe out in the community, including feeling safe from violent offences such as knife crime. One victim of knife crime is one victim too many. This bill addresses knife crime particularly committed by minors. We know from the evidence that was presented by the deputy commissioner to the State Development and Regional Industries Committee that knife related crime in Queensland has increased by 18 per cent since 2019. We see this increase particularly reflected in offences committed by minors. Anything we can do to remove the opportunity for a dangerous weapon to be sold to a minor is a great step forward.

We know that the bill will prohibit the sale of knives and other weapons, known as controlled items, to minors; make it an offence for a person to falsely represent themselves as being over the age of 18 years for the purpose of being sold a controlled item; and require retailers to display signage advertising the legal prohibition against the sale of controlled items to minors. We know that those controlled items include knives, swords, machetes, axes, sickles or scythes, spear guns, spears and replica firearms including gel blasters.

The bill also prohibits controlled items from being sold or advertised in a way that suggests the item is suitable for combat, intended to be used for violence, or likely to stimulate or encourage violent or criminal behaviour involving the item. We are talking about images such as machetes with blood dripping from the edge of the blade or marked with words such as 'headsplitter' or 'killer' or 'slayer'. This sends shivers down the spine of all of us.

The bill also imposes obligations upon the suppliers of particular controlled items to safely secure the items at retail locations and makes consequential amendments to support these reforms. On that last point I note the recommendations of the committee around awareness and education and support for retailers. I commend the minister for accepting those proposed amendments.

I know that these changes are going to better align Queensland with other jurisdictions such as New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia—in fact, I think every jurisdiction in Australia. It is going to send a strong message that people should not be carrying knives in public and gives courts the tools they need to keep the community safe. It comes on top of existing strategies to prevent knife crime including Jack's Law, which we passed last year. Again, I acknowledge the work of Belinda and Brett.

I think it has been confronting for all of us but certainly for members of the public to see the images of how that law was rolled out. We were seeing images of young people carrying machetes, axes and scythes in their backpacks. What are young people doing going on a day out or a night out with those sorts of implements in their backpacks? I think it has been confronting for everybody to understand that that happens and how much it happens. It is great to hear the statistics that 435 weapons have been seized. That is 435 possible instances of violence against another person that could have been perpetrated in a knife related offence.

This bill will also complement the strong laws we put in place last year with the support of the LNP—and I thank the LNP—that target serious repeat offenders. Those laws have been in place now for almost a year. We are starting to see some strong figures. For example, on the breach of bail changes, nearly 1,700 child defendants have been charged with new breach of bail offences for a total of just over 4,000 charges.

It is also important for us to understand why young people opt to use knives. Tom Allsop from PeakCare presented to the committee how some of those things could be addressed. Of the almost half a billion dollars of investment in our early intervention and prevention programs, we are starting to see outstanding results from some of the programs that we put in place that address the reasons that young people are of that mind. We have our intensive case management program. We have seen a 51 per cent reduction in the frequency of offending and a 72 per cent reduction in the proportion of crimes. Our youth co-responder team has had 92,000 engagements across the state. Our on-country program is showing great promise. We are addressing matters like disengagement from school.

We know that nearly every young person in the youth justice system has disengaged from school, and we have committed almost \$300 million to address the reasons those young people are disengaged and in the youth justice system. With our Putting Queensland Kids First strategy we are starting from scratch and saying that we have to get it right from the beginning of a child's life—from conception. I hope that every member in this House, regardless of what side they are on, will look at that document and give feedback, because it is so important that we get that right.

I recognise, as I think the committee reflected on and a number of people have talked about, that this is a lot for retailers, and I thank them for their involvement in the committee. I very much value the presence of the National Retail Association on my Youth Justice Reference Group. They are a constant reminder that they and their members are often very vulnerable to the impacts of youth crime, so I really welcome those comments.

Quite aside from the impact of these laws on crime itself, one of the things former police commissioner Bob Atkinson said in his report to me when I was previously youth justice minister was that everything we do in youth justice has to be bookended by community safety and community confidence. It is important that we have these laws and we are deterring young offenders. It is also important that the community can see we have strong laws in place and that police are discovering these weapons and they are acting on that, particularly after the horrific incident that occurred only last week.

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge my local police, Senior Sergeant Dave Buttram, the officer in charge, and all of the officers at Morningside police station who have been magnificent in their efforts to increase community confidence in my community. They do amazing work and it is a privilege to work alongside them. I thank them and all of the police for the work they are doing. I commend the bill to the House.