




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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QUEENSLAND COMMUNITY SAFETY BILL

 **Mr HUNT** (Caloundra—ALP) (4.04 pm): I rise to make a contribution to debate of the Queensland Community Safety Bill. I thank the committee members for their time and work on the report: Peter Russo, the chair and member for Toohey; Jonty Bush, the member for Cooper, who remains one of the most passionate advocates for victims of crime in Queensland; Sandy Bolton, the member for Noosa; Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore; and, lastly, Jon Krause, the member for Scenic Rim. The secretariat, as always, provided first-rate support to all members and I thank them for their hard work yet again. The Minister for Police and Community Safety, Mark Ryan, introduced the Queensland Community Safety Bill 2024 into Queensland parliament in May of this year and it was referred to the Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee. The committee has made a single recommendation to this House—that is, that the bill be passed.

Our kids in Queensland are absolutely fantastic. The LNP consistently referring to them as ‘a generation of untouchables’ is quite disgusting. Our government’s Community Safety Plan for Queensland includes evidence-based prevention and intervention services which focus on five key pillars: supporting victims, delivering for frontline workers and services, detaining offenders to protect the community, intervening when people offend and preventing crime before it occurs. As Police Commissioner Mr Steve Gollschewski correctly and professionally identified, the bill was introduced to enhance community safety through initiatives outlined in the Community Safety Plan for Queensland.

Part of the bill’s consideration proposes to extend the persons who may be present in court under section 20 of the Childrens Court Act for criminal proceedings only and to also include persons who have a proper interest in the proceedings, accredited media entities and representatives from Child Safety or Youth Justice. The bill proposes to enable the court to exclude particular persons from the courtroom if, after considering prescribed matters, the court is satisfied that it is necessary to prevent prejudice to the administration of justice or for the safety of any person, including and especially the child. The overarching policy justification for this amendment, as outlined in the explanatory notes, is to enable criminal proceedings in the Childrens Court to become more open. While the Youth Advocacy Centre and Queensland Law Society expressed opposition to these changes, Australia’s Right to Know supported the principle of these changes. For the committee’s part, we are satisfied that sufficient protections are incorporated into the amendments to minimise the potential impact on young people in the criminal justice system.

With community safety uppermost in mind, these changes are proposed to the youth justice principles. Currently, youth justice principle 18 provides that a child should only be detained in custody for an offence as a last resort or for the least time that is justified in the circumstances. This bill proposes to reword principle 18 to clarify that the child should be detained, where necessary, including to ensure community safety and where other non-custodial measures for prevention and intervention would not be sufficient and, just as importantly, for no longer than is necessary to meet the purpose of detention.

On the very rare occasion where the LNP have been asked to expand on some of the thought bubbles they have around youth justice, they have completely floundered. If the LNP want to claim they have some sort of judicial magic potion, the people of Queensland are going to need more than the

phrase 'it's complicated' from their shadow ministers by way of an explanation. There was significant concern raised by a number of submitters whose opposition to the amendment included: an increase in incarceration of children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, noting Queensland currently has the highest rates of youth detention in Australia; an increase in the length of custodial sentences for children and young people; and additional children becoming traumatised by contact with the criminal justice system leading to further criminality. In response, the Department of Youth Justice repeatedly noted that the amendments to youth justice principle 18 are clarifying provisions to correct the incorrect perception that principle 18 as it is currently drafted prevents the court from ordering detention as a penalty for youth offenders where other penalties are available. It does not.

Another amendment I am personally very pleased with is in response to a rise in online sharing of content by offenders relating to criminal conduct. The sharing or advertising of offences online is already an aggravating factor in the sentencing of various offences. However, the bill proposes to grant new powers to authorise police officers to issue removal notices to online publishers and social media providers if the content is glorifying unlawful conduct or increasing a person's reputation due to their involvement in unlawful conduct. The Free Speech Union of Australia had concerns about the ability of police officers to determine the intention of the poster of the material being relevant to whether the material was published for the purpose of glorifying the unlawful conduct on belief and discretion alone. I myself have every confidence that a police officer of even moderate experience can identify online content that is intended to glorify and promote criminal or dangerously irresponsible acts. Most other submitters, including PeakCare and Local Government Association, were supportive of these changes.

So far as knife crime is concerned, in 2021 police officers were granted temporary powers to use handheld scanners without a warrant in designated safe night precincts to detect unlawfully possessed knives. The introduction of Jack's Law in 2023 extended this temporary power to 30 April 2025 and expanded the scope of the scanning provisions to include public transport stations and vehicles. In response to community concern regarding knife related crime in Queensland and the number of knives seized in accordance with the Jack's Law framework, the bill proposed to expand the powers of police officers to operate handheld scanners in public places.

I will take a moment at this point to highlight the excellent work of Michael and Kerri-Lyn Stewart, a dedicated Sunshine Coast couple who tragically lost their only son, Balin, to knife crime in 2022. These incredible people have now dedicated themselves, at great personal cost, to ensuring this never happens to another family by founding the Balin Stewart Foundation. This foundation leads discussion and education sessions in our schools, highlighting both the dangers of carrying knives and how it is possible 'to bin the blade for Balin'. I was delighted to join with Minister Mark Ryan earlier this year to secure significant funding for the foundation so they could continue their excellent work.

I myself am supportive of the expansion of these powers, noting the department's response that a scan is not a search. The scanned person is not touched by a scanning wand, but if they have a metal object on their person which they fail to produce when given a lawful direction then they may, as a consequence of their own actions, be subject to a search.

Offences surrounding the possession of a knife were perhaps the most accidentally, or perhaps deliberately, misinterpreted element of the amendments, so please let me capture the QPS response in relation to farmers and chefs et cetera possessing knives. In response to concerns raised by AgForce and other submitters regarding the carrying of pocketknives or knives used for legitimate purposes, such as food preparation et cetera, QPS noted that a person will only commit the knife possession offence if they possess the knife in a public place or school without reasonable excuse, which will include for use for a lawful practice or activity. QPS stated at the second public briefing—

For example, if a farmer has a knife for legitimate purposes and they happen to be in a public place, there will continue to be a reasonable excuse provision for that. There will be no changes to how it is currently operated in practice.

I would finish by providing reassurance around the introduction of firearm prohibition orders, an amendment that perhaps more than any other attracted misinformation. Sadly, if the correspondence my EO received on this matter is any indication, I fear that a significant proportion of this misinformation was deliberately manufactured and distributed. I am mindful of the very significant point made in the explanatory notes that reported an increase in the number of reported offences involving firearms since 2013. As with knife crime, let me simply reiterate the sentiment of no less an authority than our Queensland Police Commissioner, who noted that those who would most likely meet the threshold requirements for issuance of an FPO would likely have already had their licence cancelled due to their offending behaviour.

Community safety has been at the heart of my working life for more than two decades prior to being elected the member for Caloundra. On that very basis I am happy to commend the bill to the House.