




Speech By
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MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL

 **Mr JKELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (12.10 am): I rise to make a contribution to this very important debate. I start by acknowledging all of the victims of crime and those members of this chamber who have shared their experiences. No crime is acceptable, and we should always have that at the forefront of our thinking as we work to support the victims through a grieving and recovery process and on their road to justice. I have cared for many victims of serious violent crime in my nursing career. It is always a troubling and difficult experience for the victims to not only recover from their physical injuries but also deal with the psychological damage, the trauma, the impact on their families and their careers and their ability to feel safe in their community or their home.

I would never say to anyone that I know what it is like to be a victim of serious crime, but I can say that I do care deeply about victims. If I am able to, if there is an incident in my community, I attempt to make respectful contact with the victims of crime to offer my support as an MP. Some people take this offer, seeking practical support in a number of ways. At some point when they do, there is often a shift in focus to what can be done to prevent further victims—whether that involves changes to systems, resources, policies or legislation. I have always worked to take those things forward. In this I know I am not alone. There is not a single member of this chamber who is not deeply moved when they hear of a violent crime or a victim of crime in their community and there is not a single member who does not want to prevent people becoming victims of crime.

This bill is an attempt to put into legislation the commitment the LNP took to the election to take this approach to youth crime. Our leader has said that our party acknowledges the mandate that the LNP has for its Adult Crime, Adult Time policy, but this bill goes well beyond that mandate. We have attempted to act in a constructive manner to be able to support the outcome the government is attempting to achieve. We have tried to offer alternative approaches, which the shadow minister did yesterday with her amendment to the second reading—not, as some speakers to those amendments said yesterday, in an attempt to redraft the clauses. If members actually read the amendment they would know that it sought simply to redraft this bill to remove certain clauses and have those re-presented to allow for proper parliamentary scrutiny to occur in relation to these very significant consequential changes.

The Bar Association in their submission pointed out, while the broad intent of the LNP plan was known, the specifics were revealed less than two weeks ago. They noted it was simply not enough time to work through such important changes. It is the specifics of the clauses beyond introducing adult sentencing for children who commit crimes that have a significant capacity to result in unintended consequences. It is certainly worth noting what Professor Goldsworthy of Bond University said in his submission. It states—

The last time legislation was rushed through the parliamentary process like this it resulted in the ill-conceived and problematic VLAD anti-bikie laws that were a dismal failure in terms of combating organised crime.

The shadow minister in her contribution has outlined a range of potential unintended consequences that should be considered more thoroughly. I think the fundamental reason we should take more time is that we do not want more victims of crime or more trauma for victims of crime. That is one of the first issues with this bill. It says that it wants to put victims first but, instead, it potentially puts victims on trial. There has been no indication in this bill of how the increased numbers of children who will inevitably be incarcerated will be managed. Surely, if you are anticipating an increase in youth detention numbers—regardless of the form that takes—the government must be considering how this would be managed and be able to explain how this will be managed. That has not been done in the current examination of this bill.

There is more I could say about other unintended consequences such as restorative justice, or the fact that this bill will lead to harsher penalties for children than adults, or the fact that mandatory sentencing will lead people to be less likely to plead guilty. Other speakers have covered these things. I will move on.

I want to commend the focus on rehabilitation, but I reject the notion that there was nothing happening in this area. While it is commendable to say that a 12-month plan will be in place, if it is not resourced properly it will fail. Other than constant references to 'gold standards', there is scant evidence and detail available on what form this will take, let alone how much it will cost. Whilst rehabilitation is great, I think all members of this chamber agree that preventing crime in the first place should be a high priority.

I read with interest the analysis of crime rates in Queensland contained in Professor Goldsworthy's submission. I took a deep interest in this aspect of many submissions that covered these issues, including the submission made by Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre—a fantastic organisation in my community providing space for healing and support for young women and gender-diverse people who have been impacted by sexual and domestic violence. Zig Zag noted in their submission—

... statistics also demonstrate that youth crime in Queensland has been steadily declining over the past decade, with 2021-2022 being the lowest in recorded history.

I do not want to get into a statistics argument, but it is challenging when all of these submissions contain very different views on the extent and the nature of the problem. In my experience, people who are victims of crime actually do not care to have discussions about statistics. Instead, they want support to recover and often to focus on how to prevent more people becoming victims. When I talk to people in my community, they also do not really care too much for stats. They agree that any amount of crime is too much, that we should support victims and that we should try to address the drivers of crime to prevent further people becoming victims.

There is a high correlation between youths who offend and youths who are disengaged from education. Free kindy, expanded pathway colleges, more flexi learning centres, Skilling Queenslanders for Work—these were all things we were doing, and I urge the LNP to stay the course on these initiatives. I do not know enough about this Men of Business program that is being pushed, but I will certainly look into it. Between the Pathways colleges and the Skilling Queenslanders for Work programs, we already have established evidence-based programs that really do make a difference. I hope we can remain bipartisan when it comes to preventing domestic and family violence, because we know that exposure to DV as a child correlates very highly with involvement in the criminal justice system for young people.

We put some amendments to provide a way forward to more thoroughly consider these issues. Our party position is to recognise that the LNP have a mandate for their Adult Crime, Adult Time slogan, but I personally struggle with that. Again I turn to the submission from Zig Zag, which capture my thoughts. It states—

There is overwhelming evidence to indicate that the 'adult time for adult crime' policy will be a failed policy that will only serve to increase rates of youth detention—an approach that has been proven to not only be ineffective but to cause serious long-term harm and trauma to disadvantaged children and young people. The criminalisation and imprisonment of vulnerable children and young people is a failed approach that does not provide the necessary support or 'rehabilitation' to address the drivers of youth offending.

While I acknowledge the mandate that the LNP has to implement the Adult Crime, Adult Time aspects of this legislation, when I listen to young people in my community around these issues there are some recurring themes. I think there is no doubt that people want action. There is no doubt that people want to be and feel safe in their communities. There is no doubt that people want victims of crime supported. People want to prevent crime and all people tell me that they want us to get these laws right. I think if we get these laws right, we will see fewer young people ruining their own lives and the lives of others. The vast majority of young people I deal with are fantastic people. They are Scout

leaders. They are great students. They are funny. They are enthusiastic sportspeople. They plant trees. They teach young kids to dance. Lots of them like to work and they work hard. They all seem to like weird music with what I assume is a lot of swearing—but I am only guessing, because I cannot really understand it anyway. The young people I meet are positive, make massive contributions to our community and want to be part of a great community.

The people in my community—whether they are young or old—want all young people to be like that. That is why we have to get these laws right. We have an incredibly high risk of getting these laws wrong if we rush them. There are widely divergent views on this bill on my community. I think if more time is taken to properly consider these matters and to consult the community, including the much maligned experts, we have a much greater chance of arriving at a consensus on a way forward that would be broadly supported across society and much more effective at achieving the policy objectives. I think if more time were taken we would achieve the policy objectives that I think we agree on. Certainly the things that my community tell me are important are that they want to see fewer victims of crime, better support for victims, more young people living full and meaningful lives and greater levels of accountability for people who commit violent crimes. Ultimately, what they really want is genuinely safer communities.