




Speech By  
**Margaret Nightingale**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

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Record of Proceedings, 12 December 2024

**MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL**

 **Mrs NIGHTINGALE** (Inala—ALP) (12.01 pm): I rise today to speak on the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024. As I begin, let me state clearly: every Queenslanders deserves to feel and to be safe in their home, at work and in their community. Whether you are walking down the street, sitting in your living room or sending your kids off to school, you should feel confident that your safety is a priority. I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge all victims of crime. The Labor opposition—indeed, all of us in this House—recognise the often enduring pain and suffering that is caused by crime. One victim is too many and I want to express our collective commitment towards supporting those affected by crime. Queenslanders have spoken. They have voiced their concerns about crime and, as an opposition, we are listening. We understand the desire for stronger measures and we respect the will of the people. Labor will not stand in the way of increased maximum sentences for youth offenders but the bill, as outlined by many stakeholders, goes further than what the LNP took to the election. Even more troubling, it contains elements that could lead to a number of unintended consequences for victims and may serve to work against the goal that I am sure we all share to make Queenslanders safe.

The proposed reasoned amendment moved by the shadow attorney-general made that clear. It did not call for a delay in passing the bill, only for the removal of some clauses to allow more time for them to be given due consideration informed by evidence. However, this bill is being pushed through the House without adequate consultation or proper scrutiny. It ignores the evidence that has been provided—evidence that makes clear the concerns of unintended consequences to victims and community safety. We must be careful not to pass legislation without fully understanding the impact of every clause.

Like many, I am new to this place and, although some months have passed since my swearing in, the idealism with which I entered this chamber has not worn off. I believe that all in this chamber came to this place with a shared vision to achieve positive outcomes for Queenslanders and to engage in a contest of ideas with that very goal in mind. I believe that we must work together to achieve this. I came here with a determination to ensure the decisions we make must be based on evidence. We cannot afford to act in haste or to ignore expert advice. We must listen to the experts, respect the stakeholders and carefully examine the potential consequences of the legislation we pass.

I know firsthand that tragic consequences can and do occur when governments fail to listen and get things wrong. I think back to the closure of the Barrett Adolescent Centre which was pushed through without proper consideration of evidence. I will never forget the efforts of the expert panel that warned the then LNP government of the risks to vulnerable young people who would be left without the care and support they needed. I still remember the calls from parents, mental health experts and even the young people themselves begging the government to rethink their decision. They did not, and the consequences were tragically disastrous. The scars of that decision are still felt today. I cannot express the feeling of absolute despair and powerlessness when you are trying to comfort desperate young people who know that, because of that decision of those in power, they will not survive and being at

one funeral after another trying to console parents, family and staff who tried to save them from that decision of government. I will never forget it, and I had hoped the same of those opposite who were involved in that decision—who talk a big game about accountability yet do not follow through.

I had hoped that the tragic outcomes of those decisions would weigh heavily on them. It may have been a decision of the former LNP premier, but it was the current Premier who sat with him. I looked at the faces of those who failed those young people from Barrett, their families and other stakeholders. I am haunted by the Premier's words from yesterday—

The best barometer of how one conducts themselves in the future is how they conducted themselves in the past.

A shudder went down my spine at the very utterance of those words because I am so very well aware of how they conducted themselves in the past, how the Premier conducted himself in the past. I am so disappointed that this government failed to learn from their past behaviour, that they did not take the time to examine and that they have not explored the areas of this bill that they have been warned about by experts. These provisions ought to be carefully examined and subjected to a proper committee process—not just pushed through because of political pressure.

I am also concerned that this rushed bill has failed to effectively consider the critical issue of capacity. Queensland's youth detention centres are already operating at or above safe operating capacity. The government itself has acknowledged that these amendments may lead to children being in watch houses for extended periods. We have heard no details about how this situation will be managed. How will the government ensure the safety of these young people? How will it ensure the safety of the frontline staff who work in these facilities? How will police be trained in time to implement these laws by Christmas? I am proud of the great police training programs that take place in my electorate at the Bob Atkinson Operational Capabilities Centre in Wacol. I want to ensure that police are adequately and safely resourced to act on these new laws.

I have a watch house directly opposite my electorate office. The Brisbane detention centre and many of the prisons and remand centres that will house these young people are located in my electorate. Many of my constituents live near these facilities, and my electorate is home to many of the hardworking police, custodial officers, teachers and other public servants who work in these facilities. I represent a community that will likely be disproportionately affected by these laws. For me, this is not just a question about the broader impacts for Queenslanders; it raises real and significant concerns regarding the impact on the safety of my constituency.

It is crucial that the government explains to this chamber how it plans to address capacity issues. How will the government ensure that those public servants who already work in challenging and complex circumstances in these facilities are adequately protected? Many have raised these concerns with me. Neighbours who are custodial officers are fearful of potential riots.

We are prepared to work with the government to improve this bill. We tried. We tried to move amendments to bring reason to this House, to listen and to take the time to examine just some parts of the bill, yet those opposite failed to listen. We understand the need to address youth crime and we want to ensure that any changes made are carefully considered and evidence based.

I respect those who have shared the stories of victims, many of whom have suffered tragic losses at the hands of youth offenders, and I know that more is needed to be done to prevent these offences. However, whilst this place works to prevent tragedies as a result of crime, it is paramount that the actions of government do not result in their own tragic outcomes—outcomes that can be prevented through proper scrutiny and evidence-based practice.

We want a safer Queensland—that is a goal we all share—but let us not forget the lessons of the past. It is a grave concern that the government has given this House no time to carefully consider these concerns and I will hold its members personally accountable.