




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (4.07 pm): I rise today to express deep concern about the Queensland government's Making Queensland Safer Bill. I ask the question: will it really make us safer? I do not think there is one person in this chamber who does not want to keep Queenslanders safe in their home and in their workplace or see a reduction in car thefts, home break-ins, juvenile crime or any crime. That is abundantly clear to everybody who serves in this chamber. This legislation was introduced with the promise of enhancing community safety, but I believe it will not do that, and many like myself believe that the proposed legislation is deeply flawed.

I am acutely aware, like many, of the challenges we face across this state. I see it all too frequently in my electorate of Cairns. Rightly so, people are frustrated and angry. Some of those people are my family and my good friends—too many people around the state. We all acknowledge that more needs to be done. Ignoring the well-researched evidence of experts from around the world I believe is not the right thing to do. It not only disregards fundamental human rights principles but also ignores overwhelming evidence showing that punitive approaches towards youth crime are ineffective and actually harmful. I believe that this bill will fail to achieve its stated goals and in fact will exacerbate the very issues it claims to address.

At the core of this bill is the decision by the Crisafulli government to treat children as adults, imposing life sentences and harsher penalties on offenders as young as 10. I note that the federal LNP have worked with the Albanese government to acknowledge that 16-year-olds do not understand social media. They are taking that power off them. What a contrast we are seeing here.

This approach tears up well-established sentencing principles designed specifically for children. Research consistently shows that treating children punitively rather than focusing on rehabilitation results in higher reoffending rates. Detention, especially for young offenders, is not a deterrent: it is a breeding ground for future crime. These are the facts and they remain undisputed. Studies indicate reoffending rates between 70 per cent and 90 per cent among children who have experienced detention. Children are not miniature adults. Their cognitive development, emotional regulation and decision-making abilities are still maturing. Children must be treated in a manner that promotes their dignity and worth. I am not saying that children should not be incarcerated, but I am talking about the specific piece of legislation that has been presented here. This bill disregards that fundamental principle. Instead, it punishes vulnerable children further into a cycle of crime and disadvantage.

The impacts of this legislation will disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, exacerbating existing inequalities. Indigenous children are already overrepresented in Queensland's youth detention system. Locking more children up, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, perpetrates a cycle of poverty, trauma and criminality. Instead of addressing the root causes of youth crime such as lack of education, mental health services and stable housing, this bill doubles down on punishment. This is not justice; this is systematic discrimination.

Locking up children is not only ineffective but, for those who are concerned about the economics, it is not responsible. Detaining a child is significantly more expensive than investing in community-based diversion programs. These programs have a proven track record of reducing reoffending and promoting rehabilitation, which is what the people of Queensland want. They want to see the numbers going down and they want to see it done in a sustainable way. What you are proposing is going to see them come out later, older and more affected.

In contrast, the costs associated with detention extend far beyond the immediate expenses. There are long-term social costs, including increased crime rates, higher demand for mental health services and young people emerging from detention ill-equipped to conduct a productive life. The revolving door of incarceration this bill proposes will only strain an already overwhelmed system and burden taxpayers without improving community service. If you ask police whether lockups are full and police are stressed now, wait and see what it looks like in several months.

The government itself has acknowledged the proposed amendments will lead to sentences that are 'more punitive than necessary to achieve community safety'. This is your document. This is an admission that the legislation is not about what works but rather about political optics. This tough on crime stance has been debunked by decades of research. The evidence is clear: punitive measures do not deter crime. We would like to think it does, but it does not. What works is prevention, early intervention, diversion and rehabilitation. By focusing on these strategies we can address the underlying factors driving youth crime. Many children in the youth justice system suffer from undiagnosed mental health conditions, cognitive impairments and histories of trauma. Ignoring these conditions only compounds issues and increases the likelihood of reoffending. This bill does not address any of those points at all.

Beyond the statistical and economic arguments, we remember that many of these children have faced unimaginable hardships. I know that when you have suffered as a result of these children's actions it is hard to take these things into account, but these are still the facts. Exposure to domestic violence, substance abuse and poverty are the common threads that appear throughout these children's upbringings. These adverse childhood experiences alter brain develop, impacting behaviour and decision-making. Punishing children for the consequences of trauma they did not chose is not justice; it is cruelty.

Will this bill really make us safer? This legislation also risks creating a generation of young people who are going to be more damaged, more marginalised, more likely to reoffend and more dangerous. It ignores the potential for rehabilitation and, more importantly, reintegration, instead consigning a generation of youth to lifelong institutional trauma. We need a smarter, evidence-based approach to youth crime that prioritises prevention, rehabilitation and community support. Programs that address the root causes of offending behaviour such as mental health support, educational initiatives and family services are far more effective at reducing crime and creating safer communities. We have seen this work in other jurisdictions. Queensland has the opportunity to lead with compassion and intelligence rather than fear and retribution.

This government has failed to show courage and leadership and an ability to acknowledge the facts with its proposed Making Queensland Safer Bill. I am not for one minute saying that you do not have the people of Queensland behind you. You hold the numbers; this bill will go through. I am talking about the content of the bill and what is not in this bill. Instead of addressing the root causes of youth crime such as trauma, poverty and the lack of access to mental health services, this government has opted for punitive measures that have been proven to be ineffectual and harmful. In the long term they will not serve what we are all looking for or the people whom we represent. Ignoring overwhelming evidence, the government's approach will exacerbate reoffending, disproportionately target marginalised communities and burden taxpayers with another failed system. True leadership would prioritise prevention, rehabilitation and community support over political posturing. Queensland deserves better. Our children deserve smarter, evidence-based solutions. I think we should all be working towards better outcomes.