




Speech By  
**Hon. Ros Bates**

**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

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Record of Proceedings, 11 December 2024

**MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL**

 **Hon. RM BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (Minister for Finance, Trade, Employment and Training) (10.57 pm): Tonight I rise to speak about what will be looked back on as a transformative moment for our state—the debate and passage of the Making Queensland Safer Bill. This bill reflects our steadfast commitment to Queenslanders to have these laws in place by Christmas. It underscores the urgent need for decisive action to address the youth crime crisis that has plagued our communities for nearly a decade.

When we asked Queenslanders for their support during the election, we promised to restore law and order, prioritise victims' rights over the rights of offenders and ensure community safety, and this bill honours that promise. The bill aims to hold young offenders who commit offences, particularly serious offences, to account by ensuring that courts have primary regard to the impact of youth offending on victims and can impose appropriate penalties that meet community expectations. Under the former Miles-Palaszczuk government youth justice laws were weakened, creating a generation of offenders who felt untouchable. Serious repeat offenders were allowed to escape adequate punishment, leaving communities in fear.

As the member for Mudgeeraba, the largest electorate on the Gold Coast, I can confidently state that youth crime is the most significant concern amongst my constituents. In the months leading up to the recent state election I engaged in numerous discussions with residents. Time and time again they expressed their worries and posed the same fundamental question: 'So, Ros, how are we going to restore respect among our youths?' Over many years we have had offences in the Mudgeeraba electorate. For quite a period of time youth crime was mainly happening on the eastern side of the motorway with people coming to the Robina station because it was much easier to steal a car in places like Mermaid Waters and Robina than it was to cross the motorway and walk up a steep hill in Tallai and try to steal a car there. That has all changed and we now have offences such as stealing cars from one end of my electorate to the other.

In 2021, Belinda from the Mudgeeraba Redbacks watched live on social media as her car was trashed. I asked the youth justice minister at the time how could this possibly be happening. Belinda wanted answers. Her son actually tracked down the youth criminal on Instagram and asked her why she did what she did to his mother's car. What that young girl, who had had 20 previous charges, said to him was, 'I didn't steal it. I just took it for a spin.' That was Belinda's treasured car and she watched it being trashed on social media all the way from Merrimac through to the Bunnings car park at Robina where they found it absolutely gutted.

Only a couple of weeks ago youths took a block and tackle to a wrought iron gate in Tallai. They not only pulled the gate off, they actually pulled the brick pillars off as well to steal the car. In my electorate, I have had two fatals with youths on motorised bikes and I have had one near-fatal. These concerns reflect the broader issues of safety where you live and the need for effective strategies to overcome and address youth behaviour. Many residents in Mudgeeraba are deeply invested in finding solutions that not only deter youth crime but also foster a sense of responsibility and respect within our

young people. New figures show that the Gold Coast has the fourth highest number of offences committed by young people in the state. Between January and November of this year there were over 5,000 such offences. It is understandable that this was the No. 1 issue voters wanted to discuss. Every day Gold Coasters experience home invasions or have their property stolen. Businesses are being broken into, cars taken and driven dangerously causing harm to innocent bystanders. These incidents frequently appear on the nightly news leading the residents of Mudgeeraba to believe that they too will become victims of youth crime.

Across the state the numbers paint a bleak picture: a 98 per cent increase in youth crime over the past decade; 46,130 proven offences by young people last financial year alone; a staggering 51 per cent rise over the last five years; and in relation to victims, over 289,000 in 2022-23, a 14 per cent increase from the previous year. Under Labor the system was failing Queenslanders, it was failing victims and it was failing the young offenders themselves. This bill delivers the tough reforms Queenslanders demanded. It ensures accountability for offenders while balancing early intervention and rehabilitation.

Let me highlight some of the key provisions. In relation to Adult Crime, Adult Time, youths committing serious offences such as murder, manslaughter and grievous bodily harm will face the same penalties as adults. For example, mandatory life detention for murder will now include a non-parole period of 20 years. These are serious consequences for serious crimes. I note that this provision was welcomed by the QPS, with the QPU's submission to the committee's process noting that, despite numerous police enforcement strategies, motor vehicle theft remains a major issue for the Queensland community.

The Adult Crime, Adult Time framework is welcomed by the QPU. For too long the system has prioritised offenders over victims. The bill amends the Youth Justice Act to ensure that courts give primary regard to the impact of offences on victims. This means that the sentencing court will have to give greater regard to the impact on the victim over other factors when determining the appropriate sentence. Additionally, victims and their families will no longer need to apply to stay informed about an offender's custody status. An opt-out model will ensure they remain updated automatically. Both the QPU and Voice for Victims noted their support for this provision during the consideration of this bill by the committee with Voice for Victims reaffirming their support for the rights of victims being central to decisions regarding sentencing for young offenders.

In relation to transparency in the justice system, the media will now be allowed to cover Childrens Court proceedings, enhancing transparency. Families of victims will also have guaranteed access to criminal proceedings. When it comes to sentencing reforms, courts will be empowered to review an offender's full criminal history, including juvenile records from the past five years, ensuring patterns of offending are adequately addressed. The principle of detention as a last resort will be removed, emphasising community safety. In relation to youth justice reforms, detainees will be transferred to adult custody upon turning 18, aligning the system with public expectations.

While tough measures are necessary, we also recognise the importance of early intervention to prevent youth crime and that is why this government is investing significantly in programs such as \$175 million through our Staying on Track program, which provides 12 months of post release support where a non-government organisation will work with young people while they are in a youth detention centre, bridging the transition to community, offering stability and a pathway to education and employment over the year after release. The amount of \$50 million will go towards our Regional Reset program with nine early intervention residential programs to provide 24/7 intensive support for at-risk young people who require a higher level of care than some community-based programs can provide. These will be short-stay—one to three-week—programs. A young person can be referred to the service from school, police, Child Safety or parents. There will be \$830 million for Circuit Breaker Sentencing, a three- to six-month rehabilitation-focused alternative to detention. There will be \$100 million for gold standard early intervention which will support community-led initiatives focusing on reducing crime, boosting education, training and/or employment, include a \$50 million kick-starter program to fund new ideas from Australia and internationally and \$50 million to expand proven initiatives with key performance indicators and regular reporting. These initiatives reflect our beliefs that prevention is as vital as appropriate penalties.

Queenslanders deserve to feel safe in their homes, workplaces and communities, but today, sadly, many do not. Victims are tired of watching repeat offenders walk free only to re-offend. They are tired of being an afterthought in a system that should protect them. It is not just victims who have been let down by Labor, our police have been let down time and time again by the former Labor government. Under Labor we saw police officers leaving in record numbers, disillusioned by the catch and release program created by the former government's weak youth justice laws. Police have put significant resources and funding into fighting Labor's youth crime crisis and in return they wanted a government

that supported them by giving them the tools they needed to keep the community safe. That is what the Crisafulli LNP government is doing with this bill. The Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 will see an end to police officers trying to do their job with one hand tied behind their back. The bill sends a clear message: if you commit an adult crime you will face adult time. We make no apologies for prioritising the rights of victims over offenders and we make no apologies for taking a stand against the youth crime crisis. These laws are tough on crime and they are necessary. Queenslanders have backed them and now it is time to act.

To those who oppose these changes I ask, 'How many more victims must we see? How many more families must endure heartache?' The Making Queensland Safer Bill is a pivotal step towards a safer, better Queensland. It addresses all the failures of the past. Unlike those opposite, we do not think crime is a media beat-up; unlike those opposite, we believe in consequences for action; and unlike those opposite we will prioritise the rights of victims over the rights of youth criminals. With these reforms we say to victims, 'We hear you, we support you and we will fight for you.' To offenders we say, 'The era of leniency is over', and to Queenslanders we say, 'Your safety is our unwavering priority.' I commend this bill to the House.