




Speech By
Hon. Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL

 **Hon. ST O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (Minister for Housing and Public Works and Minister for Youth) (5.06 pm): Today I rise to support the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024. This bill is a promise made to Queenslanders and it is a promise kept. It reflects our commitment to ensuring that every Queenslanders feels safe where they live, where they work and where they go to enjoy everything our state has to offer. This addresses the failings of the former government—failings which saw communities across our state struggling with a surge in youth crime—by finally delivering laws to put the rights of victims and their families first.

For too long, Queenslanders have felt unsafe in their communities. In my own part of the Gold Coast I have spoken with parents worried about their children's safety, with small business owners devastated by vandalism and theft and with elderly residents who no longer feel secure in their own homes. Safety where you live is a fundamental right. Every Queenslander deserves this when they are walking down their street, opening up their shop or relaxing in their home. This bill prioritises community safety through decisive reforms, ensuring serious youth offenders finally face consequences. By imposing penalties to fit the crime, increasing rehabilitation programs and emphasising the rights of victims, we are taking action to restore faith in our justice system.

One story stands as a tragic reminder of why these reforms are so urgently needed, and it is a story that I have told in this House before. Five years ago this Friday, on 13 December 2019, 17-year-old Jack Beasley was murdered. He was senselessly stabbed to death in the middle of Surfers Paradise. Jack's life, full of potential and promise, was cruelly cut short in an unprovoked attack by a group of teenagers who had no regard for him or anyone else in their path of destruction. This senseless crime shattered not just Jack's family but our entire community. His parents, Brett and Belinda, have shown immense courage in transforming their grief into a tireless mission to ensure that no other family endures the heartbreak that they have.

I acknowledge that this week Jack's Law went live in New South Wales. A couple of weeks ago we had the announcement of similar legislation in Tasmania and we have seen similar laws in WA. We are getting Jack's Law across the nation. I want to acknowledge my new colleague, the member for Capalaba, for his powerful first speech and his contribution to this debate. The member reminds me greatly of Brett Beasley. They are two ordinary blokes who went through something unimaginable. It is great to have him in this House fighting for other victims. We are so proud to have him on this side of the chamber.

Under the laws of the previous government, offenders like those in Jack's case faced penalties that many in our community found inadequate. It was frankly heartbreaking. The perpetrator charged with Jack's murder received a 10-year sentence with parole eligibility after seven years. This meant Jack's killer would walk free before his 23rd birthday. Our community has rightly asked, 'Is this justice?' Under the Making Queensland Safer Bill the consequences would be much clearer. For murder,

offenders would face life detention with a minimum non-parole period of 20 years. For manslaughter, the minimum non-parole period would rise to 15 years. These reforms ensure the punishment reflects the gravity of the crime.

Beyond the legal consequences, this bill also strengthens the rights of victims and their families. The opt-out changes to the register are sensible. I have seen firsthand with the Beasleys and others how traumatic basic administrative dealings with those government agencies can be. These changes will ensure families like the Beasleys are prioritised in our judicial process, that they are treated with the respect they deserve and that they are kept informed and involved as their case progresses. These changes matter because the impacts of crime ripple far beyond the immediate impact of the act itself. Jack's death rocked our community to its core. From his teammates at the Helensvale Hornets to his fellow students at Pac Pines state high, his loss was deeply felt. It is only right that our laws reflect the weight of this devastation and act to prevent such tragedies from happening again.

The Making Queensland Safer Bill is part of our broader plan to secure a better future for our state. Safety is not just about the here and now; it is about laying the foundation for a Queensland where everyone can thrive. By focusing on prevention and rehabilitation alongside this strong enforcement, we are building a justice system that prioritises community safety while addressing the root causes of crime. From what we have heard in this debate, those opposite have not learnt anything from the election result on 26 October. I have listened to a lot of contributions over the last couple of days and I could not tell you what their position is. I have absolutely no idea.

Mr Nicholls: Neither do they.

Mrs Gerber: I don't think they know either.

Mr O'CONNOR: Great interjections from the health minister and the youth justice minister. We saw them try to carve out most of the bill—

Mr Power: Not true.

Mr O'CONNOR: They did. They tried to carve out most of the bill and send it to next year. They have all spoken negatively about the legislation while conversely saying that somehow they accept the election result and that these laws are what Queenslanders want.

Ms Pease interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Martin): Member for Lytton.

Mr O'CONNOR: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your protection. This was not about improving this legislation for those opposite; it was buying time to figure out how to resolve their own disunity, how to sort out the mess they find themselves in on how to respond to this bill. These laws are not being done in isolation; they are part of the most comprehensive youth justice policy platform an opposition has ever taken to an election. The Making Queensland Safer Bill is more than just a response to the youth crime crisis; it addresses Labor's failures of the past, tackles the challenges of the present and plans for the future, a future where every Queenslanders has a safe place to call home. I commend the bill to the House.