




Speech By
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MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL

 **Mr KING** (Kurwongbah—ALP) (4.14 pm): I rise today to make a contribution to the debate of this legislation. At the outset I have to say that, while I want better outcomes for victims of crime—we all do—I worry about what will be some of the negative impacts of this bill as it stands. Queenslanders have big hearts. We see that every day. We see it when our communities are impacted by natural disasters—flooding, bushfires, cyclones. We see it at Christmas time, when donations flood in for gift hampers and essential goods for families doing it tough. We see it in the giving of care bags and toys for kids entering foster care and in so many other ways. I know that Queenslanders have big hearts. That is why I was not surprised to hear so many reservations about this bill as it was rushed through our parliamentary scrutiny processes—reservations that children may lose the chance for rehabilitation or the chance to atone for their mistakes in a productive way; reservations that children may lose any chance of learning from their mistakes with care and support from their community; reservations about the impact of privacy breaches on children during court processes and, for some children, the trauma of talking about their abuse or neglect as a precipitating factor to crime whilst on the witness stand in front of the media. These are just some of the issues that were raised during the government's brief consultation process.

I heard these same reservations in my own community during the election period. I will never forget arriving to attend Narangba Valley State High School Seniors Celebration Showcase Awards Night and seeing the LNP's big Adult Crime, Adult Time truck parked right outside the school. I do not know what the intention was, and I am sure it was not what it came across as, but I thought it was in poor taste, and I was not alone. Quite a few parents and teachers remarked to me that night on the inappropriateness of it.

No-one ever wants to wake up and find that their car has been stolen—and I have had that happen to me twice—or feel the terror of someone entering their home with ill intent. Nobody wants to be a victim of crime, but, beyond that basic principle, no-one wants to hear of crimes being committed against them by a child. Perhaps we get so outraged when it does happen partly because it forces us to examine how a child could be driven to such desperation—such an extreme measure as committing a crime, especially serious crimes like motor theft, assault or breaking and entering—in the first place.

In this debate we have not heard much from the LNP about the role of parents or families in preventing youth crime; nor have we heard much about the role they might be expected to play in the gold standard early intervention measures promised by the LNP—interventions, it has been acknowledged by the LNP, including in the committee's report on this bill, which must sit alongside this legislation to successfully achieve a reduction in youth crime.

I will read out the KPIs outlined by the LNP on 30 September 2024 for programs which are seeking government funding to deliver early intervention programs. No. 1 is 90 per cent of kids do not commit crime during the program and in the 12 months after completion. No. 2 is 75 per cent school or

training attendance rate or, where applicable, holding down employment. No. 3 is 100 per cent of participants engage in community engagement or outreach activities to build connections into local communities. No. 4 is 100 per cent of participants have regular contact with participants each week of the program.

It is unclear to me what that last point actually means, but I am sure the words 'parent' and 'family' are not included in these KPIs or anywhere else in that press release, or in the press release about the LNP's special assistance schools, though there was one mentioned in the Regional Reset intervention announcement where the LNP explained that a parent could refer their own child to the program. Apart from that, there is not one mention of the importance of partnering with parents and families to support kids with challenges or special needs in the education system, in rehabilitation or in intervention processes themselves. Clearly, the gold standard does not require family input.

Through the development of this legislation and its companion interventions, I also cannot see any consideration for the fact that a kid might steal a car because their mum and dad have never driven them anywhere, or a kid might break into a house and steal because they have never had new shoes or steal food because there is nothing to eat at home. None of those are good ideas. None of them are good options. However, how are these kids going to get to their early intervention program? What will they wear? What will they eat?

Furthermore, in the announcement of the LNP's Regional Reset program, the now Minister for Youth Justice and Corrective Services said—

Under the program, at-risk and out-of-control youths can be temporarily pulled-out of their high-risk environments ...

For one to three weeks the LNP will pull kids who are at risk of entering the justice system out of environments the government acknowledges are 'high risk'. They will be given some skills, some wraparound support—I do not what that looks like—and then what? Are they sent straight back to the high-risk environments that caused these kids to be identified as needing help in the first place? Will the parents and families be notified of their child's participation in these programs and expected to transport them there and pick them up afterwards? Will there be family counsel offered upon the at-risk child's reintegration to the family home as part of the wraparound support, or will the intervention simply be another entry on the child's expanded criminal history record when they are being sentenced later under this legislation? The complexities around youth crime are much deeper than the four-word slogan from which this bill was born and they are unlikely to be solved in one to three weeks, though it is interesting to compare the policy extremes here. Intervention—or helping—takes a couple of weeks but adequate punishment requires locking some kids up for life.

Lastly on interventions: we have heard the LNP, and their mates in the red union, accusing the education system of failing to keep teachers safe in classrooms, usually from kids with behavioural challenges and suggesting this explains teacher turnover. Often it is the kids with behavioural challenges who end up in conflict with the justice system, so I am keen to hear how the government is recruiting teachers for these new special assistance schools. I wonder whether they will put aside their aversion to paying teachers what they are worth for the purpose. As I said, the complexities of youth crime run deep. I do not think they can be solved without at least some examination of common family and other environmental factors among youth offenders such as domestic violence, poverty, disengagement from education, substance abuse and child neglect or abuse.

I have said before in this House that no child is born bad. I do not believe any parent sets out to do a bad job, either. On this side we know it is hard to police what occurs privately in a home. I want to thank every person on the front line of this issue—our early education workers, our teachers, our teacher aides, our hospital staff, our police force and our child safety workers—for the work you do in identifying families—kids in particular—who need intervention and support. It is not an easy thing to take that first step in probing into personal lives, but it is an incredibly important one in regard to reducing youth crime.

When we talk about the statistics on victims of crime, it would be interesting to explore how many youth perpetrators have been counted as victims themselves, and how this factors in the application by magistrates and judges for the elevation of consideration for victims in cases where they are essentially faced with victims on both sides. I want to thank the committee for acknowledging on page 15 of its report that the rate per population of young people offending since 2019 has decreased. It is interesting that any discussion about the effect of population growth on crime statistics—youth crime or otherwise—was shut down during the election, although it is a pretty natural assumption that where there are more people there will be more crime. Those parameters were reset once the now Premier said if victim numbers rose under his leadership that he would resign.

In my electorate of Kurwongbah we have heard directly from Queensland police officers that crime numbers were decreasing in our region. I have had to get police out to reassure aged residents in some of our manufactured home parks they can sleep through the night without terror, despite what they see on the news. Our police do a great job and I commend them. I look forward to seeing the transparency the LNP's promised will be the hallmark of this new government when we examine the efficacy of Adult Crime, Adult Time over the months and years to come.

There are some elements of this bill I would like to see amended. We have suggested sensible amendments to get some parts of the bill examined further by stakeholders. These amendments were informed by stakeholders' submissions. They were literally shouted down and voted down yet, I see some amendments come in now—with not long to go—that we are expected to be all over. They look quite substantive. Anyway, stakeholders wanted our amendments; the government does not want them. The government's promise of transparency and listening to Queenslanders seems to have failed at the first hurdle. I do not think that this legislation can work without strong intervention and I hope the work around the intervention measures is not rushed like this bill. I would like to also see parts beyond the four-word slogan and election pitches examined further for the sake of victims and Queenslanders.