




Speech By
Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Record of Proceedings, 13 February 2024

**SUMMARY OFFENCES (PREVENTION OF KNIFE CRIME) AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (3.32 pm): I listened with interest to the member for Bulimba in relation to what she had to say about what this government is doing regarding the youth crime crisis that is pervasive throughout Queensland. I reflected on what she said, because I had the same note down about what Bob Atkinson said in 2018 when he reviewed the youth crime laws. He said, 'Community safety is paramount, along with community confidence.' I have a message, Minister: the community does not have confidence in this government to fix the youth crime crisis.

Every day when we go out we hear reports from members of the community. Every day on our local community Facebook pages we see film, photographs and video of young offenders trying to break into people's houses. Whether they are kicking down doors, whether they are breaking into cars, or whether they are scouting out premises, it is happening every day. Fundamentally, the reforms this government has brought in since 2015—and I have counted all of the changes—have weakened the laws in the state of Queensland. Most importantly, they have weakened the laws in the state of Queensland since 2015-16 when the Attorney-General, who is still the Attorney-General, came into this place and said, 'The changes we are making will make the community safer.'

There is one question you need to ask: do the community feel safer today than they did eight or nine years ago when these changes were brought in? They weakened the laws in relation to bail. They said that bail was almost a right and courts were obliged to grant bail to youth offenders. They removed detention as a last resort. They took other steps to wind back the changes that had been made in the final 12 months of the LNP government. The Childrens Court report of 2014-15 showed a five per cent reduction in the number of individual offenders turning up to court. What have we seen? We have seen almost a doubling of recidivist repeat youth offenders. These are the ones who are getting bail. These are the ones who are not being sentenced to a term of imprisonment for the offences they are committing time and time again.

The youth justice minister, the Attorney-General, the Premier and the Deputy Premier were all in that cabinet. They all sat around that table. Those ministers all approved every one of those changes to the legislation as it came through, as it was being put forward and as the youth crime crisis got worse year after year. When those opposite come in here and say, 'Don't make a political thing of it. We should all work together. It should be all sweetness and light and harmony,' I say balderdash! I say that is a complete and utter load of rubbish. The Labor government has been caught out, and the people of Queensland are seeing straight through all of their pleas.

We have supported sensible changes since early 2020 and the term of this government under the leadership of the former member for Inala, Annastacia Palaszczuk. My, hasn't she been airbrushed out of the last nine years of history! Has anyone even mentioned her name? Apart from a less than one-minute spray by the new Premier this morning, she has been airbrushed out of history. In 2021 we

supported the changes and suggested introducing breach of bail as an offence. We circulated the amendment, moved it outside the long title, and this government refused to allow debate on it. In 2022 we supported further changes to the legislation. In terms of the electronic monitoring of offenders, we said that we would support it but we had real doubts about its effectiveness. Now we find out there have been 33 devices in total. It has not worked. Now the Premier is going back to it. He has nowhere else to go because we know—

Mrs Gerber: His cupboard is bare.

Mr NICHOLLS: I would like to thank my colleague for taking my line: because we know his cupboard is bare. On this side, the LNP works collectively together for the common good. We do not leak against each other. We agree and support each other all the way through. We are a team. We are not split up by the Blocker faction, the Old Guard faction and the Kate Jones faction from outside. We are not like that. We are all in it together to deliver the right priorities for Queensland, including making Queensland safer.

We supported that legislation. We said that we had problems with aspects of it but we did not want to stand in the way of making the community safer. We will say the same thing in relation to this legislation, which we are also supporting, but we will highlight the issues in relation to it, including the issues that are going to affect small and family businesses and that will increase costs for small and family businesses. I am not talking about Bunnings or BCF; they can afford it. They can manage it. It is an imposition but they will manage. In terms of the small camping store, the small bait and tackle store and the small local store like the guy up at Rainbow Beach who sells just about everything from tent pegs to knives and forks in case you left them behind at home—I happen to know—what are they going to do?

It is interesting to note page 12 of the committee report, which states—

The QPS clarified the provision of financial assistance to support the training of staff regarding verifying proof-of-age requirements is a decision for government.

That means there is no money and the QPS is not going to do anything about it, so small and family businesses will end up paying for the training for the work that is being imposed on them by the government because this government's legislation so far has failed to curb the incidence of youth crime, particularly knife crime.

We have heard people talk about the incidence of youth crime and the increase in youth crime. There has been a 22 per cent increase since the 2018-19 financial year, when youth crime laws were weakened by this government. No-one is saying, 'That's horrendous. What's happened in the four years that's led to this fascination with knife crime? Why has this been allowed to occur under this government?' This government is responsible—not the opposition, not the police, not the magistrates, not the judiciary. It is the government that passes the laws that set the standard. It is this government that has presided over an increase in knife offences from 1,784 offences in 2018-19 to over 2,170 reported offences in 2022-23. That is a 22 per cent increase or a net 300 more offences being committed.

I was gobsmacked to hear the Premier this morning come in and say, 'We're going to do everything we can. We're going to open up the courts and we're going to pass legislation.' Only a week ago, he said that there was no need to change the legislation. Premier, here is the test for you and your government, because later today amendments will be circulated outside the long title of the bill which will open up the courts to media scrutiny. It was Magistrate Power who said that the legislation demands the courts be closed. Here is the opportunity to fix that—right now, right here, today. The legislation can be amended.

I heard the Premier say, 'We will have a full and robust debate.' He said that at 10.19 this morning. Let us have the debate. We are ready. Is the Labor Party ready to debate? We are ready to talk about removing detention as a last resort—and that is the other thing—so that you unshackle the hands of the judiciary so the punishment can fit the crime. As the member for Lockyer so eloquently put it, it does not mean that every young offender will be going to a detention centre. What it means is that those who commit crime after crime after crime will face a penalty commensurate with what the community demands, because at the moment that is not happening. We read all too often about a tragedy that has occurred and the offender has been out on bail or has been let out on some other sort of program other than a term of detention. The first obligation of any government is to protect the current law-abiding citizens, and this government is failing.

Fifteen people have lost their lives at the hands of young offenders—15 people. All the fine words and the sympathetic statements mean little if no concrete action is being taken to address the issue. We know the government can do it. They did it with breach of bail. They overrode their own Human Rights Act in less than 48 hours, so do not come in here and say, 'We can't do it,' or 'The rules prohibit

it.' It can be done. It is not as if opening the courts is a new idea. It has been done and it has been spoken about. The current Attorney-General is the one who changed it and the Premier said that he was going to speak to her. That is not going to do the trick. The law needs to change. Allow reporting of the courts and remove detention as a last resort. Make Queensland safe again.