




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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YOUTH JUSTICE (MONITORING DEVICES) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms JAMES** (Barron River—LNP) (6.13 pm): With a crime crisis still plaguing Far North Queensland we know more needs to be done. That is why we are continuing to expand our Making Queensland Safer Laws. I welcome the announcement today to expand these laws to cover 33 crimes, which is another step in addressing Labor's youth crime crisis. We also need to extend the trial period for electronic monitoring systems. That is why I rise today in support of the Youth Justice (Monitoring Devices) Amendment Bill 2025.

Labor's inaction with youth crime is evident across the state, no more so than in Far North Queensland. Let us look at the numbers: 400 is the number of hardcore repeat youth offenders responsible for nearly half of all youth crimes in the state. Youth crime has increased in Queensland by 88 per cent in the past decade under the misguided Labor government that cares more about youth criminals than keeping Queenslanders safe.

Far North Queensland is one of the hardest hit areas, with 78 repeat youth offenders residing in Far North Queensland—that is one in five youth offenders residing in Far North Queensland. According to Queensland Police Service data released last November, the Far North was officially named the state's youth crime capital. Youth reoffending remains a significant challenge in our region. However, our government's targeted initiatives, like the Flying Squad, have contributed to a 7.2 per cent reduction in serious assault offences and a 52.2 per cent reduction in grievous bodily harm reported offences.

The reality is that youth reoffending remains a significant challenge for our region. One would think, with the stats showing how bad the crime is in Far North Queensland, that the trialling of these monitoring systems would have been a really big priority for the previous Labor government, but guess how many were deployed in Far North Queensland in the trial during the past four years?

A government member: Two?

Ms JAMES: Zero—a big fat doughnut! Again the Labor government has failed North Queenslanders by not trialling this in our region. This trial has been going for four years and it is a disgrace that Far North Queensland was not included. No wonder we have the highest rates of repeat youth offenders in the state. It is shameful that our region was again neglected. Again Labor shows how it does not care about any region outside of Brisbane and South-East Queensland. Far North Queensland matters and it deserves to participate in this trial that has been shown to reduce youth on bail from reoffending. This time extension is imperative to ensure a comprehensive review of the program, ensuring enough data is gathered to assess its effectiveness. Low trial numbers across the state, together with the complete exclusion of the Far North, means we have no data to prove the effectiveness of monitoring these youth while on bail.

Last year in Cairns a teenage repeat youth offender who had an extensive criminal history, including 144 prior convictions, was responsible for a stolen car crash that resulted in the death of a 14-year-old friend. Would this have happened if this youth offender was equipped with a monitoring device or had not been released time and time again because of Labor's soft laws?

The 2025 bill does not introduce major changes but simply extends the monitoring trial for one more year to gather more data before a final decision is made about its future. Good policy is built on solid evidence. A similar GPS monitoring program in New Zealand identified that this program reduced recidivism rates by up to 77 per cent for high-risk offenders, demonstrating that electronic monitoring can be an effective tool in reducing repeat offences and improving rehabilitation outcomes. For our 400 hardcore repeat youth offenders, this equates to 108 youth going down a different path, one that does not involve terrorising our streets or our people or stealing our cars; 108 youth whom could have had consequences for their actions even if they are on bail. Of course, there will always be the loud minority who are against it, but the silent majority needs to step up and be heard because we know a slap on the wrist is simply not enough for these youth. Further action must be taken to make our communities safer.

Our detention centres are close to capacity, with about 70 per cent of detainees held on remand. We have just opened a new 76-bed youth remand centre at Wacol, which has additional facilities planned; however, this will take time. The time extension for this trial will enable the government to properly evaluate the effectiveness of electronic monitoring, in particular prioritising and protecting our citizens. Most importantly, the extension of this bill will enable Far North Queensland to be a part of this trial.

Monitoring these repeat youth offenders is one part of the puzzle. Keeping them accountable while they are on bail conditions and tracking them is another step in the right direction to stop the cycle of reoffending. Real-time checking to better support our law enforcement is welcomed by our busy police who waste hours trying to find these youth criminals who breach their bail. We need a system that allows our police to do their job. We need real data, real evidence and real studies that support the use of electronic monitoring systems. We must support our hardworking police who are doing their best to monitor the movements of these repeat youth offenders. We must do what we can to ensure these youth criminals are compliant with bail conditions.

The community has called for stronger measures to address the youth crime crisis and this side of the House is listening. Far North Queenslanders are frustrated with repeat youth offenders, especially those on bail, who treat our court system like a fast-food drive-through. They want solutions that work. Enough is enough. Electronic monitoring is one such solution to tackling the youth crime crisis that has plagued our state for far too long. This is not the be-all and end-all solution but part of a holistic approach to youth crime that includes harsher punishments, stronger bail and sentencing laws, family intervention, expanding rehabilitation programs and more juvenile facilities for offenders. It also provides key data and statistics to ensure we are successful in tackling youth crime.

I have spoken to many of our hardworking police in Far North Queensland. I have spoken to the community. I have spoken to small business owners and community groups. We all agree that this program must be properly evaluated and trialled in Far North Queensland. The Youth Justice (Monitoring Devices) Amendment Bill needs to continue under the guidance of the Crisafulli government. I support the Youth Justice (Monitoring Devices) Amendment Bill 2025 and I look forward to Cairns finally being a part of the trial, because we must continue taking action to protect our communities and support rehabilitation efforts. I fully support this bill.