




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 20 May 2025

**MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER (ADULT CRIME, ADULT TIME) AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Mr DALTON** (Mackay—LNP) (8.11 pm): I rise today to speak in strong support of the Making Queensland Safer Adult Crime, Adult Time Amendment Bill 2025 that represents not just legal reform but a turning point in the justice system of Queensland. This legislation expands section 175A of the Youth Justice Act 1992 to include 20 additional serious offences that will now attract adult penalties when committed by young offenders. These include crimes like attempted murder, rape, kidnapping, arson, torture and trafficking in dangerous drugs—offences that are devastating and have consequences for victims, families and entire communities.

I speak to this bill not only as a member of parliament but also as someone who served for many years in the Queensland Police Service.

Mr Stevens: Hear, hear! Front line.

Mr DALTON: I worked as a frontline officer—yes, thank you—and served as a crime prevention officer where my role included engaging with young people at risk and keeping them from falling into a life of crime in the first place. I have seen both sides of this issue. I have seen the promise in young people who were given the right support at the right time and I have seen the harm that repeat youth offenders can inflict on families, victims and even themselves when the justice system fails to intervene early and decisively. I can tell honourable members with confidence that the balance in our system has been lost. For far too long we have lived with the consequences of a youth justice system that placed the rights of offenders over the rights of victims. From 2015 onwards the former Labor government made repeated changes that weakened our youth justice laws: abolishing breach of bail as an offence, making detention a last resort and introducing policies that eroded consequences and undermined deterrence. That soft-on-crime approach created a generation of repeat offenders hardened by the knowledge that their action would have little to no consequences, and Queenslanders have paid the price.

In Mackay I have heard from locals and from the Neighbourhood Watch members who have stopped going out after dark. I have spoken to small businesses that have been hit again and again by break-ins and vandalism. I have listened to families, parents and grandparents who now sleep with their keys beside their bed or hidden in their homes, their doors bolted and their homes under constant watch with electronic CCTV systems. In Mackay one weekend a few years ago, in 2016, a few young offenders went on the rampage stealing multiple cars from homes. It was reported—

We haven't seen a weekend quite like this one before.

Of the 12 incidents of burglary reported to us so far from this last weekend, 1 out of every 2 involved a car being unlawfully entered or stolen from the same location. The crooks are not hiding the fact that they are actively searching for our keys ... when they break into any location.

After that weekend I was aware of the fear that these young offenders had caused in the community by talking to a DIY retailer who had nearly sold out of home security items, safes, external lighting and CCTV systems. One Mackay couple told me later that they no longer felt safe walking the dog in the evening after youths attempted to steal their vehicle while they were out on their walk. Another young mum shared her story about being alone in a house with her toddler when a group of youths attempted to force entry into the house. These are not isolated stories; they reflect a growing sense of fear and frustration across Queensland.

Statewide, the numbers are staggering. In the 2023-24 financial year there were 46,130 finalised proven offences committed by young people. That represents a 12 per cent increase on the previous year, a 51 per cent increase on five years and a 98 per cent increase over the last decade. Under the former government we saw 289,657 Queenslanders become victims of crime in one year. That is nearly 3,000 people whose lives were disrupted, some permanently, by violent, unlawful acts. Let's be clear, this is not just about statistics; it is about people, victims who feel invisible, people who feel unsupported and communities that have had enough. The Adult Crime, Adult Time reforms we are debating today are a necessary and principled response to this crisis.

Now for some expert advice. I think there are five other members in this House who have served as police officers. A police officer when searching for a stolen vehicle is always aware that the stolen vehicle could be used as a weapon against the police vehicle they are in. It is a truly frightening set of circumstances. The consequences can be devastating for the officers and the worry to our families is unimaginable. This bill ensures that when a young person commits a truly serious offence—when they steal a car and use it to ram or attempt to ram a police vehicle, when they commit a sexual assault, when they endanger life—the courts can treat that crime with the full seriousness it deserves. This is not about locking up every teenager who makes a poor choice. This is about ensuring that, for the most serious, violent and high-harm offences, the sentencing framework reflects the gravity of the crime and the rights of the victims are maintained.

As a former police officer, I know firsthand of the dangers that our frontline officers face. Every week 12 police officers are assaulted in the line of duty. I was assaulted a number of times. Police put themselves on the line to protect us and we must protect them in return. I am proud to stand with the Police Union and emergency service workers, who have welcomed the inclusion of the new offences such as damaging emergency vehicles while operating a motor vehicle and endangering a police officer while driving. These offences are not hypothetical; they are the kinds of crimes our officers are facing on the streets right now. This bill gives the courts the tools they need to deliver real deterrence.

This bill is backed by the Expert Legal Panel that brought together legal professionals, police, victim advocates and youth justice specialists to determine which additional offences should be included. Their analysis was thorough, evidence-based and community focused. They looked at harm indices and sentencing patterns and conducted 10 in-person consultations across Queensland, and they came back with a clear message: our laws must do more to prioritise the safety in our communities, support victims of crime and restore public confidence in our justice system. Importantly, the bill also introduces minor but significant amendments like allowing victims to nominate a support person to receive information about an offender's status on their behalf.

I am proud to be part of a government that is putting victims first finally. We are changing the culture, we are restoring balance and we are delivering on our promise to make Queensland safer. This is not just about punishment. Our government is also investing in early intervention, mentoring and youth rehabilitation through initiatives like Staying on Track, Regional Reset and Kickstarter grants. We are supporting the community and organisations that are doing the hard work of turning lives around.

We are already seeing promising signs—robberies down by 15.5 per cent, unlawful entry down by 11.5 per cent and car theft down by 8.4 per cent—and across the state total offences are down almost three per cent compared to this time last year. According to QPS data, Mackay and Mackay Northern Beaches divisions have seen some very promising reductions in crime. It is far from perfect, but it is definitely much better under the Crisafulli government. This is just the beginning. After a decade of Labor's failures, we have a long road ahead. We are moving in the right direction because we are listening to the victims, backing our police and restoring accountability in our youth justice system. To the people of Mackay and the communities across this state, this bill is for you. It is for the victims who have gone unheard, it is for the police who have been stretched thin and it is for every Queenslanders who wants to feel safe in their home again. I commend this bill to the House.