




Speech By  
**Peter Russo**  
**MEMBER FOR TOOHEY**

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

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (5.10 pm): I rise today to address the Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025. Whilst the opposition do not oppose the bill, I have strong reservations personally about this legislation. These legislative changes have sparked significant concern among legal experts, human rights advocates and First Nations communities.

The slogan 'Adult Crime, Adult Time' oversimplifies a complex issue by framing it as a binary choice between victims and child offenders, implying that punitive measures alone will resolve the problem. This false narrative neglects the complicated nature of youth crime, which often stems from underlying factors such as abuse, neglect and trauma. Instead of addressing these root causes, the government has adopted this slogan as a convenient story, promoting the idea that incarcerating children is a straightforward solution. However, this approach fails to consider the long-term consequences for the children involved and overlooks more effective, rehabilitative alternatives.

Until the underlying causes are addressed, especially domestic and family violence, then I believe nothing will change. I believe the best way to reduce youth crime is not by prison but by early intervention. In my opinion, punitive measures that lack rehabilitative value fail to support vulnerable children, ultimately harming both the victims and the broader community. I want to be very clear: everyone has the right to feel safe in their own home, their place of work and in their community. However, locking up children for long periods of time is not the way to achieve that. In fact, it is most certainly the way to ensure that these children know no other life than crime.

The Premier has on many occasions stated 'our government is putting victims at the heart of our plans for a safer Queensland'. If this is the case, why is there little being said about the support for the victims? At the public hearing, the Victims' Commissioner stated—

An alleged offender has a defence attorney and the state has a Crown prosecutor, but a victim of crime needs to navigate all of this as a witness or a complainant on their own. I think there is a lot to do in terms of getting the balance right.

The government needs to be focusing not just on the alleged youth criminals but in supporting the victims during the process as well.

During the hearing in Townsville, Ms Surha, who is the chair of the Townsville First Nations Community Council, said—

How is Adult Crime, Adult Time to be imposed on our young people going to make Queensland safer? In Townsville, First Nations and Torres Strait Islander children are the highest offenders and in Cleveland Youth Detention Centre we know that around 90 per cent of those incarcerated are our young people.

The Sisters Inside submission stated—

We have been consistent in our vocal opposition to the Adult Crime, Adult Time legislation, and we assert that these amendments, as well as the original Bill, are not about safety. They are about punishment, political expediency, and abandoning our children—especially Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children—at the altar of so-called community outrage. Let us be clear: this Bill will not make Queensland safer. It will deepen the cycles of violence, trauma, and incarceration that the so called 'youth justice system' purports to interrupt.

At the Brisbane hearing on 8 May, Ms Hayes from the Youth Advocacy Centre was presenting evidence to the committee highlighting concerns raised by two youth workers who recently visited the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. Both reported that the facility was in lockdown, referred to as 'separation', for extended periods. During her testimony, the committee chair suggested she review Mr Rennick's comments from the hearing on 7 May about a visit to Townsville where he described conditions at Cleveland as—

For the children in detention, on day one at Cleveland they are doing educational courses, sport, getting back into a more positive lifestyle while they are in detention.

After reviewing these comments, Ms Hayes, in correspondence to the committee, advised that—

The experiences of clients the Youth Advocacy Centre has assisted at Cleveland do not align with this portrayal.

She supplied a separation report, commonly obtained by lawyers prior to sentencing, which details the duration a young person was confined to their cell beyond the usual time for sleeping, showering and resting. The report indicated that during a 54-day period in custody at Cleveland—

**Mr HUNT:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. That report is committee-in-confidence correspondence which was not authorised for publication, and the member is referring to it.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Kempton): Member, if that report is not in the public arena, then you should not make reference to it.

**Mr RUSSO:** The report was—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member, I do not want to argue about it. The report is not in the public arena and you should not refer to it.

**Mr RUSSO:** Well, that is—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** If you have a complaint, put it in writing.

**Mr Hunt:** It was not published.

**Mr RUSSO:** That is not exactly right.

**Mr Hunt:** That is exactly right.

**Mr RUSSO:** Moving on, most of these lockdowns were attributed to staff shortages and include multiple incidences—

**Mr HUNT:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. He is still referring to that same report. That report was not published. I am not sure what I can tell the parliament about the committee proceedings, but that report was not published.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I take your point of order. Member, I will give you an opportunity to explain how that report comes to be in the public arena.

**Mr RUSSO:** The report is not in the public arena, but the email is. The email that was supplied to—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Sorry, take your seat. I would just like to take advice on this, please.

**Mr RUSSO:** Maybe I should explain a little bit more.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Take a seat, please. Thank you, member. Keep in mind, please, that you are not entitled to refer to matters that are not on the public record. You can proceed, but be careful.

**Mr RUSSO:** It is unsurprising that behavioural issues arise when an individual is confined to a cell for 23 hours and allowed only 35 minutes outside. Most people would struggle under such—

**Mr HUNT:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member is referring specifically to statistics that were not to be published. He is quoting statistics from a report that—it was made clear to the committee—was not to be published. I accept that there is an email which makes general comments about the custody arrangements, but he is referring to specific statistics in a statistical report that was not made public.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Kempton): Member for Toohey, I cannot make a determination in relation to whether the matters you raise are on the public record or not, but bear in mind that the chair of the committee will come back to the parliament with the appropriate action in the event the matters you raise are, in fact, not in the public arena. Please bear that in mind.

**Mr RUSSO:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. After reviewing the comments made by Mr Rennick, Ms Hayes, in her correspondence to the committee, advised that the experiences of clients the Youth Advocacy Centre has assisted at Cleveland did not align with this portrayal. She supplied a separate report commonly obtained by lawyers. Critics argue the reforms, which would introduce harsher penalties for children as young as 10, contradict evidence-based approaches to youth justice and disproportionately impact vulnerable groups. Advocates argue that the legislation exacerbates the system's disadvantages and cultural disconnection, undermining efforts to address intergenerational

trauma. Research indicates that punitive measures often lead to increased reoffending. Advocacy groups emphasised the need for community-led, culturally-appropriate interventions. The Justice Reform Initiative and the Human Rights Law Centre urged the government to invest in evidence-based diversion programs and support First Nations-led initiatives to address the root causes of youth crime.

Mr Allsop, the CEO of PeakCare, was asked at the public hearing if he believed the reforms were necessary upon reviewing the changes that pertain to the most serious offences committed by repeat offenders and noting that not all children involved in the justice system fall into this category? Given this context, should there be consequences for actions and could improving your approach ensure the majority of these young individuals do not face prolonged detention—provided we implement effective rehabilitation and early intervention strategies? Mr Allsop responded that the evidence strongly supports the existence of more effective detention alternatives that have been successfully implemented elsewhere and should be considered here. He said that the current system's 94 per cent failure rate was unacceptable and that, in contrast, international models that engage with young people and their families have achieved a 14 per cent recidivism rate.

Victims constantly express a preference not to be harmed in the first place, highlighting the importance of prevention over reaction. Rather than extending detention periods in a system that fails most of the time, we should focus on preventive measures that stop young people from entering the system altogether. Implementing such reforms of rehabilitation and prevention strategies could not only reduce the likelihood of reoffending but also provide a more just and effective approach to youth justice. In closing, I also support the amendments that the opposition shadow is moving in relation to sentencing amendments in accordance with the QSAC report in relation to the victims of sexual violence.