




Speech By  
**Hon. Tim Nicholls**

**MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD**

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Record of Proceedings, 1 April 2025

**YOUTH JUSTICE (MONITORING DEVICES) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. TJ NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (8.06 pm): I listened and take the guidance of the member for Chatsworth when he says ‘keep on going’, so keep on going we shall. I do not know if I can keep on going with the effusive praise for the member for Currumbin that he started off with. There is very little in that respect left to say, member for Currumbin. To say it with such enthusiasm and passion as the member for Chatsworth did and with such heartfelt generosity I think is hard to do. I think I have sufficiently praised both the member for Chatsworth and the member for Currumbin and I will keep on going.

We are in fact dealing with a very serious situation that has been at the forefront of Queenslanders’ minds for the better part of half a decade. It goes back to the time of the election of the Palaszczuk Labor government in 2016, when youth crime laws started to be watered down. At that time, those in the LNP warned of the avalanche of youth crime that would be coming our way because of those actions. We did it time and time again. I lost track of the number of times I visited Townsville. As opposition leader at the time, I think I went to Townsville 24 times in 16 or 18 months. As my good friend the member for Burdekin knows, it was the No. 1 issue we were asked about up there, and that continued under the leadership of the member for Nanango and also into the period between 2021 and 2024. Youth crime and the extent of youth crime was ever on people’s lips, as the member for Chatsworth has indicated.

Then in 2021 we had a series of terrible events. We do not need to be reminded too often of what those are. We have a representative of those events in this place now in the member for Capalaba, who has spoken so passionately, as he did earlier today, about the impact of this crime—of people stealing cars and repeat offenders being let out again. In Townsville, all too tragically in February 2021 we had the incident of Jennifer Board, who was a potential future police officer. She was innocently riding a motorbike and was killed while doing so in Townsville.

The member for Burdekin raised again in this place the discussions we had. I can well remember that we were sitting over there when the member for Morayfield was talking about this package of amendments that was going to solve the problem. The problem was not solved; it went on for another three years. It was only with a change of government to a government with the intestinal fortitude and the plans we are seeing being rolled out now—including even today with the addition of 20 new offences, adding to the existing suite of Making Queensland Safer Laws and our Adult Crime, Adult Time laws—that we have seen a government making a difference.

I think back to 2018 when a report prepared by former commissioner Bob Atkinson in relation to youth justice and what the youth justice system needed was handed to the member for Bulimba. He said that the youth justice system must be bookended by two things. I remember this, and I have said it so many times: public safety is paramount and community confidence is essential. What did we see over the period of the Labor government? We saw that public safety was not paramount. Putting the offenders first became paramount and public safety came a long distant second. What happened as a result? Community confidence in the system evaporated to the extent that we had people calling for

vigilante groups in Mackay and Rockhampton to go out. They had public meetings calling for people to go out. That is a breakdown of law and order, that is a breakdown of the system and that is a breakdown that lies fairly and squarely at the feet of a failed Labor government. By failing to heed the warnings, by failing to take action and by in fact continuing to go the other way, they made the situation worse.

**Dr Rowan** interjected.

**Mr NICHOLLS:** They were in denial; I take that interjection from the Leader of the House. They were in denial about that. They got to the stage where they said that there was nothing more that could be done about it. 'The cupboard is bare,' were the words of Mike Kaiser. Well, the cupboard was not bare. They just needed to look a bit harder and work a bit harder to find the steps to take, and they needed to stand up and take the steps against the vested interests who wanted the cupboard to be bare and who only wanted one way of looking at it. They wanted to put the telescope to a blind eye and not look more widely at what was available.

That is what leads us to the position we find ourselves in today. When that amendment was introduced in 2021, it was with a high degree of scepticism that we looked at this issue in relation to electronic monitoring of people on bail. We raised our concerns about it and we raised technical concerns about it: about having the necessary coverage so the devices could work, having the ability to plug them in to recharge them and having homes where people could go to recharge them with the necessary supervision to do so. What happened was that, because it was rushed, because there was no thought process behind it and because it was a kneejerk reaction—things we were all accustomed to in the last term of the Labor government—it failed.

Bob Atkinson was commissioned to do the review of it and he said, 'Not enough information, not enough evidence. We can't tell.' It failed in even being a trial because it failed to produce any evidence of meaning that could determine whether it should be continued with or not. Time after time after time, amendments were coming back—all the way to August 2024. In the dying days of a dying Labor government, it came back again for changes to try to make it work, but even those changes were insufficient to be able to produce the evidence to say whether the system worked or not.

I note that a number of people have expressed support for it. Some people have said that it is not everything and I think we accept that it is not everything. It is part of the toolkit that we need to use. In this respect, I think of the comments by the Queensland Family and Child Commissioner, Luke Twyford. There is no doubt that this commissioner does not always agree with everything this side of the House does, and we do not expect that. We expect a robust debate in a democracy and Mr Twyford participates in that democracy in the right way, I would suggest. He said—

Electronic monitoring has potential as a valuable tool for supervision of young offenders who have progressed through the judicial process, but the evidence base is currently limited. As such, I support the extension of the trial period as an opportunity to gain further data ...

He went on to say—

There continues to be the need for an overwhelming shift in Queensland's youth detention approach and the prioritisation of early intervention, diversion, and supportive systems.

This is not something that we on this side disagree with; this is something that has been at the forefront of our Making Queensland Safer Laws since we announced them. That is why we have put another \$485 million in funding for early intervention, crime prevention and rehabilitation programs where we see those programs at work. They are programs that will be evaluated, as will the electronic monitoring program.

It is only wise, it is only sensible and it is only proper that a program like this is extended for the period that it is, until 2026, to enable a proper evaluation to take place, to allow the data to be brought in and to allow a sober, calm and methodical assessment. When I say the words 'sober, calm and methodical', I cannot help but think of the member for Currumbin in that respect and her very Zen way of going about assessing these matters, because I am sure she will do that. I know that the cabinet she brings it to will also be a calm, methodical and considered cabinet when it makes its decision and that it will do so with the evidence in front of it and in a proper way that will give Queenslanders confidence. It will restore us to the situation that Bob Atkinson said was the bookend of an efficient criminal youth justice system—that is, public safety is paramount and the community can have confidence in the system and that it is working. That is what this bill, the bill that was introduced today and the actions we took at the end of last year do. They are about making Queensland safer.