




Speech By
Hon. Meaghan Scanlon

MEMBER FOR GAVEN

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**EXPANDING ADULT CRIME, ADULT TIME AND TAKING A STRONG STANCE
ON DRUGS AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. MAJ SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (4.19 pm): I rise to speak on the bill. As I mentioned before, my dad was a police officer and I grew up being taught at an early age the importance of consequences for action and what it means for a community when people feel safe and what it costs when they do not. I went into law because I believe in justice. I have also been the victim of crime, so this is not abstract. I have long believed—genuinely believed, not as a political position but as a matter of conviction—that if we are ever going to be serious about keeping our communities safe then we have to be serious about prevention and early intervention. If we are serious about tackling crime, we have to be willing to tackle its causes.

Nothing excuses acts of violence—nothing—and that has to be said clearly, and I mean it. When I look at the statistic that almost half of the children in our youth justice system have a disability, I cannot help but think of my brother. He needed speech therapy and physical therapy when he was young and he got the help he needed. He was in a loving household with every chance to thrive, but too many kids who need support miss out entirely and they are unfortunately the children who are more likely to end up in our criminal justice system. That is not conjecture. That is what the evidence shows, and that is what frontline services tell us every single day. That is why it is so deeply disappointing that the Crisafulli government are in some instances cutting the early interventions and health supports that we know actually make a difference, rather than investing in them. They are cutting the very programs that give a fighting chance to those kids who need a hand up.

Let me be clear about where the Queensland Labor opposition stands. We believe in strong, robust and evidence-based laws that will work. We stand on the side of victims and victim-survivors in Queensland. We want to see laws put in place that will keep our communities safe, but this bill does not achieve that. This bill is not based on expert advice and it is not based on evidence; it is based entirely on misguided ideology, on division and marginalisation and on making promises they cannot keep. The fact that the government have had to come slinking back into this parliament—changing their signature laws for the third time—is a damning indictment on them. Criminal justice reform is serious. It is not solved by a slogan, because words that rhyme do not stop crime.

On the other reforms in this bill relevant to the Youth Justice Act, the Voice for Victims Foundation—which is a victim advocacy organisation—raised concern in their submission about specific offences. I want to quote them directly because this is a victims group, not Labor, raising these concerns. They said—

The expansion to include s.311 (aiding suicide) and s.316 (stupefying in order to commit indictable offence) raises important considerations for community understanding and transparency. The Statement of Compatibility does not provide sufficient explanation of the nature or scope of these offences ...

That is a victims group. The Youth Advocacy Centre found that for seven of the proposed offences 'we can find no reported cases of children being sentenced in the last five years'. The Bar Association of Queensland stated that the list includes offences that children would 'rarely, if ever, be prosecuted for committing'. They also said—

No data is provided in any of the briefing material to indicate the incidence of these offences or whether children are committing them.

The government promised Queenslanders that the Expert Legal Panel's advice would be released as part of the committee process. The minister said it on the record in this parliament, so what happened? At the exact moment the public briefing was due to start, the government conveniently uploaded a 25-page document to an obscure publications portal. The Bar Association of Queensland had 45 minutes to review it before giving evidence. What did they find? They were unambiguous. They said it was apparent from reading the report that in fact it was not the advice that was provided to the government. It described a process. It referred to advice having been given, but it did not show what that advice actually was.

In fact, Geoffrey Watson SC—who those opposite like to quote a lot—told the *Courier-Mail* that withholding the information until the last minute was 'just appalling'. He said that the absence of real advice within the document told you one of two things: the panel either did not do its job or it was not given the right job to do. This was a taxpayer funded panel that did 12 months of work and had nine meetings, and Queenslanders still have no idea what advice they actually gave. That is a broken promise.

Let me turn to drug diversion laws because these changes are something that the Labor opposition and almost every frontline expert who appeared before the committee cannot support—not the doctors, nurses, drug and alcohol experts, or the five former police commissioners who backed this program when it was introduced. We already had a conversation about this earlier today and the fact that the AMA—one of the peak medical bodies in this state but which did not appear before the committee—said that the government jettisoned the program when the preliminary data indicated it was successful and that this was ideological and not driven by evidence. These are five former police commissioners—Katarina Carroll, Bob Atkinson, Jim O'Sullivan, Mick Palmer and Ian Stewart—not some politicians overseas who the police minister just tried to reference. These are actual former law enforcement officers whom those opposite clearly want to now deliberately ignore.

As I said, these changes will mean hundreds of thousands of hours of police time going after low-level possession rather than serious crimes. When the LNP say they are tough on crime, we need to ask them why they are pulling police officers off serious cases to process paperwork on minor possession. That is not being tough on crime; that is making the system weaker and the victims of sexual assault, home invasions and serious armed robberies will now wait longer.

What does the data actually show? From March 2024 to March this year, 32,000 people were diverted under this program and more than 80 per cent of them had no further contact with the system. Clearly, that shows this system was working. What was the government's justification for repealing it? We had a bizarre contribution from the police minister, who continues to reference National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program reports despite the fact that QNADA said the wastewater analysis cannot tell you how many people are using drugs, it cannot distinguish between heroin and prescribed opioids, it cannot distinguish between medicinal and illicit cannabis, and it cannot tell you what the right response should be. The Bar Association went further, stating there is no cogent evidence within that wastewater report linking the drug diversion program to any increase in illicit drug use. There is no evidence—that is what they said—yet the police minister comes in here and tries to suggest that is what the evidence says.

I want to briefly turn to the antisocial behaviour and designated precinct provisions. Of course our communities expect public places to be safe. Labor does not dispute that; we never have. However, service after service said that they work with people every day who are not getting the support they need. The Nambour Community Centre told us that exclusions do not resolve the underlying issue and that without clear pathways to assistance these measures will shift people around rather than address what is actually driving the problem.

When a person is excluded from a precinct, where do they go and what support is available to them? These are not hypothetical questions. These are questions this bill does not address at all. Q Shelter came and called for a housing summit to elevate the conversation and bring people to the table to address these underlying problems, but the housing minister said the next day, 'No, we're not going to do that.' Despite the fact there are 55,000 people on the social housing register, he is not interested in having a housing summit or talking about the underlying issues and the housing support these individuals might need.

We had the Mental Health Commissioner tell the committee that this bill is unlikely to achieve its identified objectives. That is why Labor moved to split this bill to have drug diversion considered separately. However, the Crisafulli government in their pig-headedness denied us that right today. I came into this place because I believe the right support at the right time actually changes lives. I believe that if we are serious about safer communities, we have to be serious about prevention. I believe health care is worth fighting for. I believe standing up for vulnerable Queenslanders grappling with mental health and addiction is worth fighting for. Because this bill cuts critical health-based interventions, because it takes Queensland backwards, because it breaks promises to Queenslanders—Labor cannot support a bill that cuts health care.