


Queensland Parliament Hansard Green

DATE: 22/08/2019

FILE: 22082019_000795_LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY_GREEN CHAMBER.DOCX

SUBJECT: (no subject found)

MEMBER: Mrs LAUGA

 **Mrs LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (4.00 pm): I rise today to speak in support of the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. All Queenslanders deserve to be safe in their homes, workplaces and communities. We expect children and young people to be law-abiding and respectful. If they are not, we expect them to be accountable and put things right. I also want the best for our state's children, as many members on this side of the House have said over the course of this debate. I want children to live safe, happy, healthy and fulfilling lives. The Palaszczuk government is absolutely focused on keeping communities safe, reducing offending and reoffending while holding young offenders to account. We want to change that story for our communities and our children and young people and that means working differently to do more of the things that address youth crime and keep our communities safe.

This bill, which is part of the implementation of the Queensland Youth Justice Strategy, makes a number of priority amendments to remove legislative barriers that may contribute to children being refused bail, breaching bail conditions or remaining in detention on remand for an extended period. Importantly, the bill does not remove discretion and aims to strike a balance between maintaining community safety and enabling the appropriate release of a child from custody.

At my recent annual youth summit that I held at the PCYC in Rockhampton with over 70 students from high schools around the Keppel region, the students told me that they too are concerned about the behaviour of some young people. They said that they think bad behaviour by young people is linked to boredom and a lack of respect being taught at home. The students also were conscious that only a small group of young people seemed to be giving other young people a bad name. And it is only a small group. Between 2017 and 2018 only one per cent of the 490,111 children and young people aged 10 to 17 in Queensland had a proven offence. By and large, young people in Queensland are law-abiding citizens and great contributors to our economy and our community. There are so many young people that I can think of in the Keppel region who are amazing contributors, doing fantastic work in their school, in their education, in sport, in their workplaces and in training and I love celebrating their achievements. Unfortunately there is a small group of young people who do the wrong thing.

Most children and young people do not commit crime and most who do grow out of it. I have met a number of young people who were on the wrong side of the law and they have seen the error of their ways. They have had the issues that led to them being offenders rectified. They have got housing, they are back at school, in a job or are in training and they have turned their lives around. It is those people who I enjoy meeting because they are real-life, living examples of people who have turned their life around after being on the wrong side of the law as a young person.

It is true that many young offenders have been exposed to more trauma, violence and drugs than most adults. I have had the benefit of talking to children involved in Project Booyah and Transition 2 Success. Some of the things they have been through from such an early age terrifies me. They have experienced and witnessed things in their life that no adult would have normally experienced. It is well established that children and young people who have experienced trauma and maltreatment, particularly in cases of severe neglect or abuse, may experience developmental issues and reduced resilience, along with immaturity and impulsivity. These factors are directly linked to the increased risk of offending and reoffending. We know that prevention programs, such as those that improve parenting, strengthen community, support families at risk, address mental illness, disability and substance abuse and respond to childhood delay and education problems are not only effective but also extremely cost effective. Prevention generates long-term savings to taxpayers by reducing pressure on detention centres, police and justice systems.

I support the bill introducing an information sharing framework to assist government and non-government organisations to assess and respond to the needs of young people in the youth justice system. It is currently difficult for organisations to share information between them and to appropriately assess and respond to the needs of juvenile offenders. We know that an holistic approach that considers all aspects of a juvenile offender's life is necessary.

Many juvenile offenders do not have their basic human needs met, such as a safe place to live and access to basic medical treatment. In fact, I have met some young people who do not even have a birth certificate, access to a Medicare card or have never seen a doctor in their life. They need caring parents or guardians. Some of them do not even have access to clean running water or food. This component of the bill precisely addresses the issue relating to information sharing between government and non-government agencies. This is fantastic because this will allow agencies to have a full and frank discussion about the needs of young people in the youth justice system. Housing can talk with police, Child Safety, Health and Education and the youth justice providers can now have a conversation around a table about a specific case as a result of these amendments.

This was raised at a community safety forum that I held recently at Yeppoon. Parents of juvenile offenders and some agencies expressed frustration with the sometimes disjointed management of cases between government and non-government agencies. I am pleased that this bill will put a new information sharing framework in place that will better streamline the support services for juvenile offenders and their families. This bill is an important step in continuing the significant progress that has already been made in reforming Queensland's youth justice system. I commend the bill to the House.