

Joint Statement 10 July 2024 Queensland Youth Justice

We support efforts focused on creating safer communities, reducing youth offending and delivering justice and services to victims of crime.

It is our collective commitment to work with all parties and community organisations to develop long term and sustainable solutions, strategies and programs that reduce offending, that are age appropriate and that are restorative.

We remain deeply concerned at the alarming rate of children and young people in detention and absolutely condemn the detention of children in watch houses. This increase in the numbers of Queensland children and young people in custody has created serious safety and rehabilitation challenges which need to be addressed.

We also know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are being imprisoned at alarming rates, an increase by 40 percent over the past three years. The negative impact this is already having on our First Nations communities is extremely harmful.

We are therefore concerned at the LNPs newly proposed laws which would mean children and young people with limited cognitive function due to their age will be imprisoned in detention facilities for longer periods of time.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with the LNP to discuss their proposed policies and talk through the evidence base underpinning these approaches. We believe it is possible to collectively work together and create solutions that make a significant difference to the trajectory of life outcomes for Queensland's children and young people.

Our concerns stem from evidence Internationally, which shows that long term detention increases the chances of repeat offending behaviours. Like all Queenslanders, we do not want to see children and young people's lives characterized by criminal behaviour. It is important that we adopt approaches that don't train kids to become better criminals.

We are specifically concerned about adult sentences for motor vehicle offenses. The intent behind motor vehicle theft is markedly different from murder. The latter contains an element of malice and intent to harm with the former stemming from risk taking behaviour that can be difficult for young people to moderate if there are problems with behavioural regulation or executive function. These crimes are not the same and we believe need different approaches. We implore the LNP to reconsider this element of their policy and work with us to develop consequences that match the crime.

We are frustrated just like the broader community, and we acknowledge that whilst decisive and drastic steps may feel like the right response, we know that a more nuanced and incremental approach will get better results for Queenslanders.

We need to better understand the factors driving the behaviours of all young serious repeat offenders and identify means to change their life trajectory so that contact with the justice system is reduced. We also need to explore alternatives to traditional detention for kids and acknowledge that there are potentially societal-level unintended consequences of detention that are harmful and long term.

We know that having our children and young people engaged with family, education and community activities will not only support them in their emotional, developmental and physical well-being, it will help to reduce offending behaviours.

Investing in children and young people and their communities, building meaningful relationships and ensuring that they are engaged in purposeful activities that will set them up for success is at the heart of what will create long term change.

Quotes Attributable to Garth Morgan, Chief Executive Officer, QATSI CPP

"QATSI CPP is committed to working with all parties to keep Queenslanders safe and children supported to have positive futures"

"We are keen to sit down with the Leader of the Opposition and talk through his proposed policy approaches. We have time before the election to collectively shape up a solid and effective set of measures that meet the needs of children and the expectations of everyday Queenslanders"

"It's important to maintain flexibility in our approaches, so we can make quick adjustments as evidence comes in. Good governments and good systems continuously learn and adapt, and this is especially important in youth justice where we can't rely on set and forget solutions"

Quotes Attributable to Aimee McVeigh, Chief Executive Officer, QCOSS

"These dangerous policies will make our communities less safe."

"We know many children who are connected to the youth justice system are often victims themselves – victims of domestic and family violence, living in poverty, without enough food to eat and without proper shelter."

"The younger a child is coming in to contact with the justice system, the more likely they are going to reoffend."

"We know this doesn't work. No expert is suggesting that a youth justice system that treats children as young as 10-years-old as adults would reduce crime and keep our communities safer."

"QCOSS implores the LNP to reconsider this baseless policy that would punish some of the most vulnerable children in the state; and commit to evidence-based policies to address the root causes of criminal behaviour."

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