



Minister for Children and Youth Justice Minister for Multicultural Affairs

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Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
ClerksOffice@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to petitions 3753-22 and 3762-22 tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 22 June 2022 titled 'Toowoomba crime and Youth Justice Act'.

I would like to assure the petitioners that community safety remains a top priority for the Palaszczuk Government. All Queenslanders have the right to feel safe in their homes and communities.

More than \$750 million has been invested since 2017 to protect the community by reducing youth crime. This investment has delivered a new youth detention centre, additional staffing and extra beds in the existing centres, increasing from 212 beds to 306 since 2017, and a range of new and expanded intervention programs to reduce reoffending.

Last year the Government announced additional initiatives to focus on the serious repeat offenders. This included legislative changes to strengthen how children who offend are dealt with in the court system, including:

- a presumption against bail for children who commit certain offences while on bail for a prescribed indictable offence (eg. driving a stolen vehicle, robbery);
- courts having the ability to consider whether parents, guardians and others are willing to support the child to comply with bail conditions before bail is granted;
- a new principle in the *Youth Justice Act 1992* that stresses the community must be protected from recidivist high-risk offenders; and
- legislating the requirement that in sentencing children, courts consider whether offences were committed while on bail.

These laws are amongst the toughest in the country and are resulting in more serious repeat offenders being held in custody, and for longer. The average number of children in custody rose by over 30 the month after these laws were introduced. This was 70 more children than the same month in the previous year. By September 2021 there were 100 more children in custody than in the same month the previous year.

In February 2021, the Government established a Youth Justice Taskforce (the Taskforce) to oversee the reforms. The Taskforce is now focused on building intensive multi-agency case management of the serious repeat offenders across the state. This includes each agency coming together to address issues that contribute to reoffending, including education, employment, health, accommodation and family supervision, to support long-term, meaningful change for children.

To further ensure our investment is working, former Police Commissioner Mr Bob Atkinson AO APM has undertaken an independent review following six months of implementation of the reforms. Mr Atkinson's report is being considered by Government.

The 2022–23 Budget includes increased funding of \$78.8 million over four years to continue to reduce youth offending and keep the community safe through reforms under the Youth Justice Strategy, including:

- funding for Indigenous Youth and Family Workers and for Family Led Decision Making to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in decision-making and identifying solutions to address the child's offending behaviour;
- continuing the work of youth co-responder teams, in partnership with the Queensland Police Service, to conduct joint patrols, check that bail conditions are complied with, and divert children from offending;
- funding to expand the number of locations for Multi-agency Collaborative Panels to meet demand across the state; and
- recurrent funding for additional permanent staff in youth detention centres.

While we are taking serious and considered steps to intervene early, break the cycle of reoffending and target repeat offending, the Liberal National Party (LNP) is putting forward proposals that have clearly failed in the past.

I acknowledge the petitioners seek restoration of 'breach of bail' as an offence. However, I would like to highlight that the LNP did not have a 'breach of bail' offence.

The LNP had an offence called Finding of Guilt While on Bail (FOGWOB) which did not effectively deter or reduce crime. It was an offence for offending on bail. During the two years that the offence was in force 185 children were convicted. However, the courts found that the offence could not attract any punishment. It was ineffective in reducing offending, with 94% of the children convicted of the offence being found to have reoffended within 2 years.

A backward step to the LNP's failed FOGWOB offence represents a softer approach to youth justice and community safety in Queensland. I am confident that this is not what the community wants.

Police have always been able to arrest a child without a warrant if they breach a bail condition (such as having contact with a co-accused or not residing at an approved bail address) or if they commit an offence while on bail. They can also arrest a child if the court issues a warrant when they have failed to appear in court.

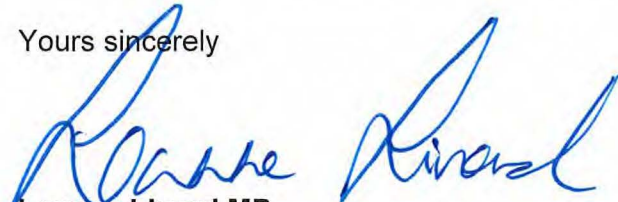
To support the initiatives put in place to protect our communities, the Government has also committed to deploying 2025 extra police personnel, the largest investment in police resourcing in this State for decades.

On 15 June 2022, the Honourable Mark Ryan MP, Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services, and Katarina Carroll, Police Commissioner, announced 29 new frontline police officer positions and a new Mobile Police Beat for the Darling Downs District. Toowoomba, as the central hub of the district, will benefit significantly from the additional resources. This will boost the frontline response, including the capability to investigate youth crime and enhance community safety. The new Mobile Police Beat will complement local policing resources, providing greater flexibility and allowing police to deploy directly to areas of community need.

While the Government has a strong focus on keeping our communities safe, it is important to recognise there will always be children who, despite the best intentions of the Government and all the help available, may still break the law. We will continue to hold them to account.

Finally, I reiterate that all Queenslanders have a right to feel safe in their homes and communities. We are committed to providing evidence-based interventions that work to reduce crime and keep children who offend accountable.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Leanne Linard', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Leanne Linard MP

**Minister for Children and Youth Justice and
Minister for Multicultural Affairs**