

ABC NEWS

The Watch House Files: Queensland corruption watchdog denies visiting children in watch houses

Exclusive by Mark Willacy, ABC Investigations

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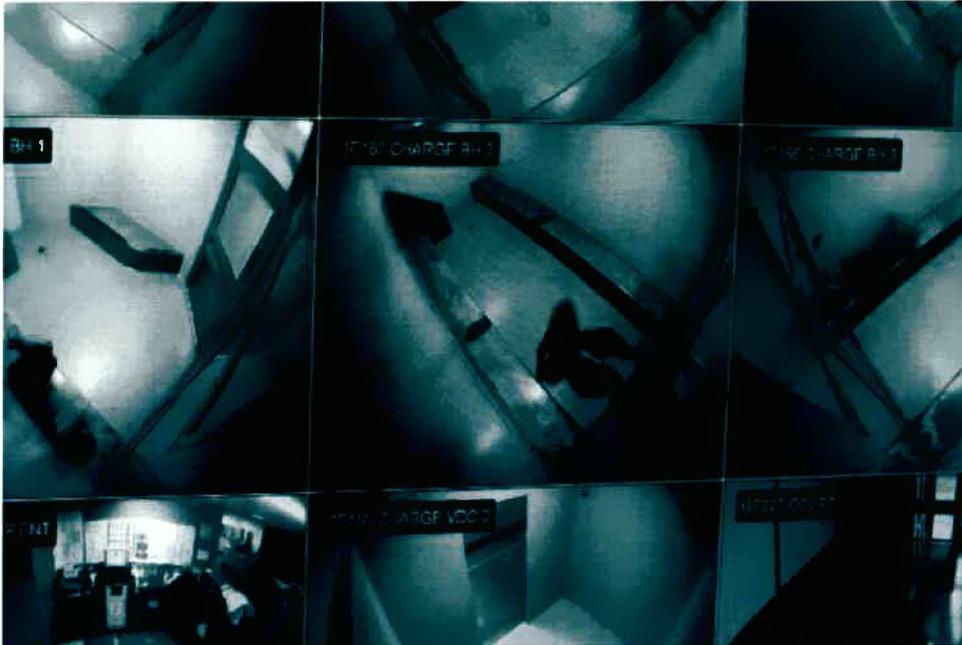


PHOTO: Four Corners has revealed serious incidents involving children in watch houses. (ABC News: Four Corners)

Queensland's powerful corruption watchdog has denied the State Government's claim that its staff visit children being held in adult maximum-security watch houses.

The Palaszczuk Government has been under pressure to call a royal commission after the ABC's Four Corners last month revealed serious incidents involving children in watch houses, including a boy being kept in isolation for 23 days and a girl mistakenly being put in with alleged male sex offenders.

In an answer to a question on notice in Parliament from last month, Police Minister Mark Ryan said he had "been assured that young offenders in watch houses receive regular visits from independent agencies, including the Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) and the Public Guardian".

But the corruption watchdog has told the ABC it "does not have a general program of work where it visits individuals in watch houses".

The CCC acknowledged it received complaints about how people were treated in watch houses "and these are managed on a case-by-case basis".

The day after the Four Corners watch house story aired last month, Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk told Parliament that all new matters raised by the program would be "fully investigated".

But Opposition Leader Deb Frecklington last week told the ABC the Premier "had misled the Parliament" over the Government's investigation because only one matter had been referred to the police.

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RELATED STORY: Boy held in Brisbane cell 'completely naked' for days

Key points:

- The Qld Police Minister said young offenders in watch houses received regular visits from independent agencies including the CCC
- However the corruption watchdog says it does not have a program where it visits individuals in watch houses
- The Premier promised an investigation after Four Corners revealed serious incidents involving children in watch houses

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Deb Frecklington MP

Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Trade

26 June 2019

Hon. Curtis Pitt MP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

By email: office.ofthespeaker@parliament.qld.gov.au

Queensland Legislative Assembly	
Number: 561971308	
 21 AUG 2019	Tabled <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
MP: SPEAKER	By Leave <input type="checkbox"/>
Clerk's Signature: <i>M. Ryan</i>	

Dear Mr Speaker

I'm writing to ask you to refer the Member for Morayfield, Hon. Mark Ryan MP to the Ethics Committee for misleading the House in his response to Question on Notice 872 asked 15 May 2019.

The answer, provided under the standing orders of the Parliament after a 30-day period to check and confirm its accuracy, wrongly states that the Crime and Corruption Commission undertakes regular visits to youth offenders in watch houses.

In an ABC report published 26 June, it's reported that the CCC denies this saying the CCC "does not have a general program of work where it visits individuals in watch houses."

The Member has served as Minister for Police and Corrective Services since 2017 and he has direct knowledge of organisations approved to access watch houses and policy in relation to visitations.

In my view, the Member has deliberately misled the Parliament and he has done so in circumstances where a very high level of accuracy should be expected given the 30-day period for answers to Questions on Notice.

I look forward to your early response to this email.

Yours sincerely

DEB FRECKLINGTON MP
Leader of the Opposition
Shadow Minister for Trade
Member for Nanango

For more sensitive information:

- Email using ProtonMail at ABCinvestigations@protonmail.com
- Text message Mark Willacy using the Signal app on **+61 477 714 805**

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PHOTO: Officials denied a boy was left naked, saying he chose to wear a suicide smock as a sarong. (ABC News: David Sciasci)

Last week, the ABC revealed an Indigenous boy with an intellectual impairment had been stripped naked inside the Brisbane City Watch House after being deemed a suicide risk.

An officer from the child safety department raised his case, writing to the Public Guardian to say the boy had been left "completely naked" for days with just a blanket to cover himself after refusing to put on a so-called "suicide smock".

After initially telling the ABC it was not aware of the incident, the Queensland Police Service later issued a statement after the story broke to deny the child had been left naked.

It said the boy had chosen to wear the suicide smock "as a sarong for a period of time instead of in the traditional way".

Topics: prisons-and-punishment, law-crime-and-justice, police, children, child-abuse, brisbane-4000, townsville-4810, qld, australia

Contact Mark Willacy

If you or anyone you know needs help:

- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467
- Beyond Blue on 1300 22 46 36
- Headspace on 1800 650 890
- ReachOut at au.reachout.com

**Question on Notice
No. 872
Asked on 15 May 2019**

MR BOYCE ASKED MINISTER FOR POLICE AND MINISTER FOR CORRECTIVE SERVICES (HON M RYAN)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise the (a) number of youth detainees held in police watch houses as at 1 January 2017, 1 January 2018 and 1 January 2019 and (b) capacity of each watch house youth detainees are held (reported separately by watch house) for youth detainees only?

ANSWER:

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) has advised that juveniles who face serious charges are detained for their own safety and the safety of the community, and are detained in accordance with the law.

This government acknowledges that young offenders should not be held in a watch house for lengthy periods of time. The Palaszczuk Government recently announced a new standalone Department of Youth Justice to focus on this issue. This government is also funding a Youth Partnership Initiative to divert young people from crime, including high risk youth court, after hours youth diversion services and cultural mentoring.

I have been assured that young offenders in watch houses receive regular visits from independent agencies, including the Crime and Corruption Commission and the Public Guardian.

I am advised that complaints about treatment are rare, other than that they should not be there, and this government agrees.

I am advised by the QPS that the number of youth detainees held in police watch houses as at 1 January 2017, 1 January 2018 and 1 January 2019 is as follows:

Watchhouse	2017	2018	2019
BRISBANE CITY	2	12	42
SOUTHPORT	1	2	2
TOWNSVILLE	1	4	3
CAIRNS	3	7	1
IPSWICH	2	4	1
MAROOCHYDORE	5	7	7
TOOWOOMBA	2	1	1
MACKAY	1	1	
ROCKHAMPTON	1	1	
BUNDABERG	2		1
MOUNT ISA	2	7	2
PINE RIVERS	1	2	
RICHLANDS	3		2
BEENLEIGH	3	1	4

CABOOLTURE			1
MAREEBA	2		
MORNINGTON ISLAND		1	
REDCLIFFE	1	1	
WHITSUNDAY			2
CLEVELAND		2	
MARYBOROUGH	2		
NOOSA HEADS			2
KINGAROY		1	
HERVEY BAY	1		1

The QPS has provided the below table which identifies bed capacity by watchhouse.

The QPS has confirmed that adults and youth detainees are not accommodated in the same cell.

<u>Watchhouse</u>	<u>Number of Beds</u>
BRISBANE CITY	91
SOUTHPORT	72
TOWNSVILLE	42
CAIRNS	39
IPSWICH	35
CALOUNDRA	31
MAROOCHYDORE	27
TOOWOOMBA	23
MACKAY	22
ROCKHAMPTON	22
BUNDABERG	21
MOUNT ISA	21
PINE RIVERS	21
RICHLANDS	20
BEENLEIGH	16
DOOMADGEE	15
GLADSTONE	15
WARWICK	15
AURUKUN	12
CABOOLTURE	12
MAREEBA	12
MORNINGTON ISLAND	12
MOSSMAN	12
WEIPA	12
GYMPIE	10
HERVEY BAY	10

KOWANYAMA	10
ROMA	10
THURSDAY ISLAND	10
INNISFAIL	9
MURGON	9
NORMANTON	9
REDCLIFFE	9
AYR	8
WHITSUNDAY	8
CHARLEVILLE	8
CLEVELAND	8
PORMPURA AW	8
WYNNUM	8
WOORABINDA	7
YARRABAH	7
BAMAGA	6
DALBY	6
LOCKHART RIVER	6
ATHERTON	5
CHARTERS TOWERS	5
EMERALD	5
BOWEN	4
GOONDIWINDI	4
INGHAM	4
LONGREACH	4
MARYBOROUGH	4
MORANBAH	4
NOOSA HEADS	4
SANDGATE	4
COOKTOWN	3
COOLANGATTA	3
GATTON	3
KINGAROY	3
ST GEORGE	3
CUNNAMULLA	2
DUNWICH	2
PALM ISLAND	2



Minister for Police and
Minister for Corrective Services

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16 July 2019

The Honourable Curtis Pitt MP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Speaker

I refer to your letter of 5 July 2019 in relation to correspondence you received from the Leader of the Opposition and Member for Nanango on 26 June alleging that I deliberately misled the Parliament in response to my original answer to Question on Notice 872 of 2019.

I acknowledge that deliberately misleading the House is listed as an example of behaviour that the House may treat as a contempt under Standing Order 266 (2) and note that Standing Order 269 (5) provides that in considering whether such a matter should be referred to the Ethics Committee, the Speaker may request further information. I appreciate that you have written to me pursuant to that Standing Order.

I can confirm that I have lodged a replacement amended answer to Question on Notice 872 on 26 June. I also provided an apology in a letter to the Clerk of 26 June, in which I attached my replacement amended answer. Further, I made a public statement during a media conference on 26 June, advising that the initial answer was incorrect.

By way of explanation, I wish to advise that the original response to Question on Notice 872 of 2019 was based on a miscommunication in earlier advice provided to my ministerial office by the Queensland Police Service (QPS). It related to the number of visits to the Brisbane watchhouse by the Office of the Public Guardian Public and the Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC). I have since been advised that, while there were visits undertaken by the Office of the Public Guardian to the Brisbane watchhouse, there was a miscommunication in the advice from QPS that the CCC paid regular visits. The CCC has an oversight role only.

When it became apparent, through the media, that the advice in relation to the CCC visits to the watchhouse was incorrect, my ministerial office contacted the Clerk of the Parliament at 10.24am on the same day, 26 June, in order to immediately correct the record. The call to the Clerk of the Parliament's office was diverted to the Deputy Clerk of the Parliament's office and, in turn, diverted to the senior parliamentary officer in the Table Office.

My office was advised to write a letter to the Clerk of the Parliament to explain the oversight, apologise for the oversight, apologise for the inconvenience, and to table a replacement answer to the Question on Notice. At that time, my office was advised that the Table Office would then notify the asking Members.

As part of this process, my office checked the Parliamentary Hansard and other responses to Questions on Notice. During this search, it was determined that the answer to Question on Notice 809 of 2019 also contained a similar response with regards to watchhouse visits by the CCC. This Question on Notice response was dealt with in the same manner as the response to Question on Notice 872 of 2019.

I appreciate that while I have corrected the record and provided a written and verbal apology, no apology has yet been offered on the parliamentary record. As such, I unreservedly apologise for this oversight and for any inconvenience this may have caused.

I also give an undertaking to apologise to the House on the next sitting day.

Thank you for considering this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Ryan', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark Ryan MP
Minister for Police and
Minister for Corrective Services