



Minister for Children and Youth Justice Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Our reference: CYJMA 01928-2022

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Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
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Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to petitions 3703-22 and 3759-22, tabled in the Legislative Assembly, titled 'Major Reforms to Address Escalating Crime in the Far North Queensland Community'.

Firstly, I would like to assure the people of Far North Queensland that community safety continues to remain a top priority for the Queensland Government. All Queenslanders deserve to feel safe in their homes, workplaces and communities.

Since 2017, over \$550 million has been invested in new youth detention centres, staffing, extra beds and early intervention programs to reduce offending. Another \$98.4 million has been invested to deliver a balanced, evidence-based, youth justice system that holds young people accountable for their behaviour. This investment has helped divert young people from offending and reoffending and has provided opportunities for young people to turn their lives around and change their stories.

We are seeing the impact of this record investment, with the Australia Bureau of Statistics (2022) showing that for the 2020-2021 financial year the number of young people committing offences is at its lowest level in a decade. Young people make up a decreasing percentage of all offenders, declining from 17 per cent in 2011-12 to 12 per cent in 2020-21. But the government understands that there is always more that can be done to reduce youth offending.

In February 2021, the Queensland Government announced additional initiatives to focus on the 10 per cent of serious repeat offenders who were, at the time, responsible for committing 48 per cent of the crimes committed by young people. This included legislative amendments to strengthen how young offenders are dealt with in the court system, such as requiring serious repeat offenders to show cause when applying for bail, and a new principle in the *Youth Justice Act 1992* that stresses the community must be protected from repeat youth offenders.

Regarding the specific requests contained in the petition:

1. The Queensland Government continues to engage with the public on issues relating to youth offending. Since its establishment in February 2021, representatives from the Youth Justice Taskforce have undertaken extensive briefings and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders involved in delivering services to young people involved in the criminal justice system, with a particular focus in serious repeat offenders.

This engagement has occurred widely throughout Queensland, including rural and regional locations (including Far North Queensland). It has also involved consultation with elected representatives from all levels of government, non-government agencies and service providers, and the broader human services sector. Members from the Taskforce have also participated in several community forums to provide information about the youth justice system more broadly, and also to hear the views of the public, including victims of crime.

In relation to child safety, the Queensland child protection and family support system has undergone significant change since the 2013 Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry. Along the way, additional inquiries, and review reports by oversight bodies, including the Queensland Families and Child Commission, the Coroner and the Child Death Review Board, combined with the wide-ranging systemic reforms recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, have identified further changes required to the system.

Many of these inquiries have included extensive public consultation. Together, these reforms are creating the type of system required to respond to the emerging and increasingly complex needs of children and families. Evidence clearly shows these systemic changes are working. More families are having their needs met by the secondary service system and where families are engaged with the secondary service system, fewer are escalating to the statutory child protection system. Improvement of the system is continuing, with Parliament recently passing the *Child Protection Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2022* which followed significant consultation across Queensland, including Far North Queensland, regarding how to better protect vulnerable children in the child protection system.

2. The Palaszczuk Government closely monitors trends in youth crime to make sure our approach is effective. Youth justice policies and programs are continually evaluated to ensure they are having an impact on reducing and preventing youth crime. The Youth Justice Taskforce has had a particular focus on serious repeat offenders and has led reforms including enhanced cross-agency and cross-sectoral collaboration in relation to each individual child. Additionally, following six months of implementation of the 2021 youth justice legislative reforms, former Police Commissioner Mr Bob Atkinson AO APM undertook an independent review. His report – which will be made publicly available shortly – will be used to identify what is working well and where there is more that can be done.
3. Ensuring victims of crime are supported and community concerns are addressed is a priority for the Queensland Government. Consultation with stakeholders such as public community groups and special interest groups is a routine part of government policy development. Consulting with the community is also a key part of the legislative reform process – this includes consulting with victims of crime as required. As noted above, many of the inquiries into the youth justice system or related matters in recent years have involved extensive public consultation processes, and many victims and victim advocacy or support groups have made submissions.
4. The *Youth Justice Act 1992* part 7, division 16 allows an order to be made against a parent or guardian if their child is found guilty of a personal or property offence and the court deems a lack of supervision contributed to the offending and subsequent loss and/or injury to the victim. In these circumstances, the court can call on a parent or guardian to show cause as to why they should not pay compensation. The court may make an order requiring the parent or guardian to pay compensation to a maximum amount of 67 penalty units, or (currently) \$9,235.95. The court can act at the request of the prosecution, or on its own initiative.

There would be no grounds to penalise parents, economically or criminally for offences they did not commit or contribute to. This would be inconsistent with several fundamental legal and human rights and impact key criminogenic factors.

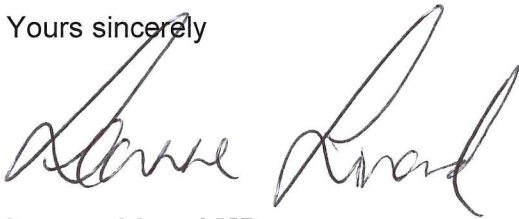
5. Foster carers are an important part of the response to children who have experienced significant harm or who are at risk of experiencing significant harm. Carers form part of the safety and support network needed to help traumatised children navigate life. The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs unequivocally supports and values this partnership and the role foster carers play in the lives of children in care.

The recently passed *Child Protection Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2022* will make reforms to the *Child Protection Act 1999* that streamline, clarify, and improve the regulation of care. These reforms include clarifying the operational reporting requirements for foster and kinship carers regarding suspected harm to a child; strengthening the carer support framework; and ensuring carers are provided with all relevant information to allow them to make informed decisions about placements and provide appropriate care.

The Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs regularly reviews legislation and associated policies, procedures, and guidelines to ensure they are best practice and based on strong evidence to deliver the best outcomes for the community. The Palaszczuk Government will always act strongly on behalf of all Queenslanders.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leanne Linard', written in a cursive style.

Leanne Linard MP
Minister for Children and Youth Justice and
Minister for Multicultural Affairs