



Speech By  
**Hon. Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

---

Record of Proceedings, 18 March 2014

### **YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. JA STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games) (3.37 pm): I rise to contribute to the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 introduced by the Attorney-General, the honourable member for Kawana, on 11 February 2014. As the Attorney-General highlighted in his explanatory speech, this bill forms part of a broader set of comprehensive reforms to the youth justice system. Encapsulated in this bill are a number of objectives with a primary focus on addressing the serious and escalating problem of repeat youth offenders who are making life miserable for citizens in our society. This was evidenced last financial year with the number of cases dealt with in the Children's Court rising by more than 10 per cent and the number of offenders increasing by more than 20 per cent. It would appear, therefore, that the do-nothing approach of the Labor government has certainly not done anything to curb these figures.

Importantly, the amendments included in this bill seek to break the cycle of repeat offenders and prevent our youth from spiralling into an undesirable and dangerous path leading to a life of crime. This will be achieved by a number of means including, but not limited to, creating a new offence for committing an offence while on bail; allowing repeat offenders to be publicly named throughout proceedings; making juvenile criminal histories admissible during sentencing of adult offenders; and removing detention as a last resort to give the court greater discretion.

A core responsibility of every government is to protect those most vulnerable—our children. It is a topic that has attracted my attention and enticed me to read countless papers written by academics and medicos throughout my adult life. Words like 'early intervention' and 'good parenting' peppered those pages and continue to do so in recent studies. My early career as a paediatric nurse brought home the critical importance of giving kids a decent start and a loving home environment. I saw numerous heartbreaking instances where family relationships had broken down or were sadly lacking.

Many models have been tried over the years with varying degrees of success, which is why the Newman government has spent much of our two years governing this great state consulting with citizens and organisations about issues such as these and many others that affect people in their everyday lives. It is a credit to this government that it not only consults widely but also adopts a genuine whole-of-government approach. I commend not only the Attorney-General, who has brought this bill before the House, but also the police minister, the Hon. Jack Dempsey, and the child safety minister, the Hon. Tracy Davis.

Today's child faces many more challenges than those born 20 or so years earlier, and many, many more than those born 50 or so years ago, as was recollected by *Sunday Mail* columnist Terry Sweetman last weekend. Terry's political views and mine are frequently at odds. However, he struck a chord when he wrote—

At age 13, life was simple. Parents spoke, children jumped. Rebellion, disillusion and confusion were words you might stumble over in a spelling bee ...

While his article was about the tragedy of youth suicide, it applies to a broader range of pressures affecting our children. Kids today live in a tech-controlled world where social media, advertising and peer pressure are tempting them from all angles, and the effects can be devastating. Cyberbullying is a growing threat that has pushed some vulnerable young people to self-harm or contemplate suicide, and I am sad to say that a number succeed. Others are the bullies themselves in both real and virtual scenarios. Parents have a really tough job steering their kids through the maze of distraction and enticement.

Honourable members may remember the savage attack of an off-duty police officer at Coolangatta on 19 November 2007. Constable Rawson Armitage and his girlfriend, Michelle Dodge, were set upon by a gang of youths aged 10 to 20 as they enjoyed a night out. In this despicable and entirely unprovoked attack on two innocent citizens, Michelle had a clump of hair violently torn from her head and Rawson was brutally bashed and left for dead. The incident was captured on CCTV and showed an 11-year-old child climb onto a paling fence and jump onto the defenceless Armitage. Not surprisingly, the viewing public were outraged. I recall vividly the viciousness and callousness of that attack—one that shocked our tight-knit community as much for its severity as for the young age of the perpetrators. In a speech to this House on 1 September 2010, I acknowledged ‘the shameful lack of parental supervision that permitted these youngsters to be out on the streets kilometres from home during the wee hours of the morning’.

It is with deep sadness that I see teenagers being lured into criminal gangs whilst still young and vulnerable adolescents, encouraged to ditch education for crime and thereby severely limiting their future potential. And, yes, it is happening in my neighbourhoods. I have confidence the Newman government’s tough new criminal motorcycle gang laws will drastically reduce the number of our susceptible youth being cajoled or bribed into joining feeder gangs. Unfortunately, antisocial behaviours have become more brazen and more dangerous, and youths are taking bigger risks with their own and others’ lives.

Rather than adopt a bleeding heart, do-nothing strategy, as we hear from Labor members opposite, we recognise that a tougher stance is needed to deter our youth from going down this path—a path that very rarely has a happy ending. Listening to the denials from the members for South Brisbane and Rockhampton merely reinforce this premise. Parents should not live in fear of wayward, sometimes out-of-control children stealing from them or harming them or other family members. And society needs to know that something is being done to stop the worst youth offenders and, where possible, rehabilitation is being offered at the earliest opportunity. Our suburbs and entertainment precincts deserve to be protected from these young thugs, which is why this government has responded to calls from communities and violated shopkeepers across the state to put a stop to this abhorrent behaviour.

I am supporting the tough measures in this bill for all of the above reasons. These proposed laws will protect young offenders from themselves and society, and strike the right balance between providing an opportunity for offenders to reform whilst also protecting the wider community from their unsavoury actions. I strongly believe this bill goes a long way towards achieving that balance.

I would like to acknowledge the great work of the Elanora police beat—namely, senior constables Kurt Foessel and Dave Simmons—alongside youth engagement officer Laci Christiaen who are making a real and positive impact on the lives of youths in the Currumbin electorate, thanks to support from this government. Project Booyah is a four-month venture aimed at disengaged or at-risk teenage girls. This is the first all-girls Project Booyah, and there are currently 11 students participating in a range of personal development and leadership activities including attending TAFE one day a week.

These officers also run a number of programs in our local schools targeting those who are at risk of disengaging with the community. Some of the classes include ‘Challenge to Change’—a drug and alcohol education program—and ‘BIF’, boxing is fun, which incorporates boxercise with a positive message regarding health, nutrition, anger management and violent relationships. They also administer KREW on Friday nights which involves a range of activities and incorporates positive messages on how to make good choices when confronted with certain situations in high school. These are just a few of the initiatives underway, and I congratulate the team for the significant influence they are having on the youth in Currumbin.

This government is making significant inroads into curbing violence and addressing law and order issues that face all of our communities. Our Gold Coast youth boot camp is another example of a positive step towards rehabilitation. On the Gold Coast we are seeing some seriously impressive results, with assaults down 16 per cent, robberies falling by 32 per cent and break and enters down

26 per cent. These positive changes are a result of a government prepared to make tough decisions in the best interests of society combined with a hardworking, dedicated police presence.

Unlike those opposite, who are in complete denial and do not even recognise the great work that is being done by this government, I am very proud to be part of a government that is unashamedly committed to cleaning up our streets and ensuring that Queensland is the safest place to live and raise a family.