



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (4.21 pm): I rise today to speak on the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. When I first put my hand up to represent the people of Southport, one of my most important goals was to help make Australia the safest place to raise a child. This is a big part of why I am so passionate about this piece of legislation and my ongoing involvement with Bravehearts.

I would ask every member in this House to imagine their kids when they were young—or their niece or nephew or grandson or granddaughter. Now imagine them locked up with adults for days and weeks on end in an understaffed and overcrowded watch house. How does that make everyone feel? Mr Deputy Speaker, I will tell you how it makes me feel. It makes me feel sick. This is what has been happening in Queensland.

I am appalled to hear that children as young as 10 years of age were being held in Queensland watch houses and continue to be held in spite of concerns raised right here in this very chamber. To make a generalisation, these are not the lucky kids—the ones with loving families and friends at school and who are getting an education. These kids are the vulnerable ones—the disadvantaged ones, those without a stable home, those who most likely have slipped through the cracks in getting the support they need to prevent them from getting on the path that they are currently on. Who is looking out for these kids? We should be. Instead, these kids are being even further disadvantaged.

Examples of inhumane treatment such as a young girl being placed in a cell with two alleged paedophiles is quite simply not good enough. Labor should be ashamed of the conditions these children are being held in. I have been working with Bravehearts for more than a decade now and I have seen and heard some pretty horrific things. These experiences motivate me every single day to advocate for the protection of our kids wherever possible, and that is why I am standing in this House to speak in support of this legislation.

I think it is appalling that a child was allowed to stay in a watch house for 45 days, especially given the legislative obligations for adults to not remain in a watch house for more than 21 days. The Human Rights Commission is seeking a statutory prohibition on prolonged detention in watch houses which will ensure the average time for children to be detained in watch houses will not extend beyond 24 hours, with 72 hours as the outside limit. Frankly, even a single day is too long, let alone up to three. The Public Guardian has recommended inserting a provision to ensure that a child should not be held in a watch house for more than 72 consecutive hours without the authority of a court. I look forward to supporting the amendments of the shadow Attorney-General to restrict the length of time children can be held in watch houses.

The bill seeks to amend the Youth Justice Act to authorise the capture of audio recordings through CCTV technology in youth detention centres and the use by detention centre employees of body worn cameras to record images or sounds. I have spoken to local police and magistrates about the positive impact body worn cameras have made to domestic violence cases on the Gold Coast. I

look forward to the increased protection of our children and the efficiency of the system to have body worn cameras in place for this purpose too. I believe it will provide greater protection and safety for kids, as well as increasing accountability for staff within detention centres.

Finally, I want to talk about another impact that Labor's watch house crisis is having on the community. I have had reports of constant understaffing at the Southport Police Station, which has one of the biggest catchments of the Gold Coast and, as a result of this watch house crisis, is struggling. Local police have been reallocated to watch house duties because of the overflowing watch house in Brisbane and the need to send Brisbane offenders to the Gold Coast. This has resulted in some regular staff from the Southport Police Station being allocated to assist with transport and the oversight of these prisoners to meet court appearance dates. Our already busy Southport Police Station is getting stretched thin.

Earlier this year *Gold Coast Bulletin* journalist Keith Woods talked about the victims of Gold Coast crime. He said that what victims experience is worse than adults being in a watch house. There is the 16-year-old boy who stopped sleeping, lost 15 kilos and became paranoid, angry, depressed and suicidal after having an ear sliced off with blunt scissors by a man he had just met. Then there is the story of Hylton Miller, who was in a coma for four months after being hit by a stray bullet while walking along the Surfers Paradise beachfront and later took his own life having never recovered from the impact of the incident. The shooter was never identified. There is the woman who was brutally raped and attacked in her own home by serious violent offender Bradley McLeod, later saying, 'There is always going to be a part of me that was lost that day and a part of me that will never recover from what happened.'

By not sorting out this watch house crisis, Labor are creating more victims. By not having as many police officers on the job of preventing crime at Southport and on the Gold Coast, they are allowing more crimes to be committed. We need this watch house crisis solved now. I am not just here to represent the people of Southport; I am also here to protect them. I sincerely hope that the minister has a change of heart and supports our proposed amendments for the betterment of Queensland kids and the improvement of the youth justice system in Queensland.