


Your ref

Our ref KT:MD

13 May 2019

Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk
Premier of Queensland
PO Box 15185
CITY EAST QLD 4002

Via email: 

Dear Premier

Children held in Queensland watchhouses

I write following on-going media reporting of the growing number of children, some as young as 10, being held in Queensland watchhouses for extended periods of time in facilities with dangerous adult offenders, and attempts by some understood to have committed acts of self-harm. This reporting is very concerning but also, sadly, not unexpected.

It is heartening to see your Government has announced funding to improve youth detention capacity and programs to reduce the number of children and young people in remand. This is welcome but is unlikely to fix the root of the problem.

QLS is aware that overcrowding in watchhouses and remand centres has been a systemic problem for many years. The latest figures relating to children are symptomatic of a criminal justice system under immense operational strain. We know there are many reasons for this and there are no magic or simple solutions to the problem.

The Society does not support children being retained in Queensland police watchhouses for any longer than is absolutely necessary. Prolonged detention in these places increases risk to both supervising police and the accused of a death in custody or accusations being made of police interference with the child. Neither outcome improves our system or our community.

We concede also that it would be irresponsible and pose an unacceptable risk of danger to the community if potentially dangerous young accused were simply released on bail purely due to the lack of adequate space in properly resourced child detention centres. The confounding part of this problem is that community safety must remain at the centre of pre-conviction detention for anyone charged with serious criminal offences.

The dilemma is leaving young children to languish in adult facilities for extended periods of time is abhorrent and endangering the community is unacceptable.

So, what is the solution?

Expanding detention centre capacity and better bail options are a start, but it is a bigger issue.

We know that often juvenile offending is a part of much deeper and more complex problems in a young person's life. We know that petty crime and factors such as broken homes, abuse, social exclusion or disadvantage, mental health problems, disability, drug abuse, truancy and a lack of opportunities or hope are strongly connected.

In many ways, rates of juvenile offending tell us that parts of our community are broken and need to be fixed.


The solution is not then a justice solution, a child safety solution, a community programs solution, a policing solution, a corrective services solution or an education solution. It is in fact all of these arms of Government working together in a coordinated and sustained way to address the underlying problem.

Queensland has started on such an approach in tackling domestic violence and it is showing promise. Similar leadership is needed to start to tackle the bigger community issues that result in juvenile offending and poverty-related crime. In the wake of the many recommendations identified in the *Atkinson Report on Youth Justice* it is time for an increased and additional public commitment to immediately act on, properly fund and deliver initiatives, programs and outcomes similar to those achieved as a result of *Not Now, Not Ever* report .

Everyone wants young offenders to gain the skills and desire to be positive and contributing members of the community rather than falling between the cracks and becoming another member of the revolving door community of life long criminals.

If we don't start to tackle it now, when?

Yours faithfully



Bill Potts
President