

24 August 2023

## Statement from Queensland Human Rights Commissioner Scott McDougall regarding the use of adult prisons and police watch houses as youth detention centres

The Queensland government has set a dangerous precedent by overriding its own Human Rights Act for a second time to rush through changes to the law to allow adult prisons and police watch houses to be used as youth detention centres.

These changes are rash, alarming, and will not reduce youth crime or make the community safer.

The introduction of these laws as an amendment to an unrelated bill, with a human rights override, means that the parliament, the courts, and the Queensland public are all denied the opportunity to properly and appropriately scrutinise them, including their likely impact on victims of crime.

The Human Rights Act allows for it to be overridden by other legislation in exceptional circumstances. Comments from the government suggest these changes are necessary to ensure business as usual can continue, but I struggle to see how something can be both business as usual and exceptional circumstances at the same time.

Bringing in changes this significant in this way makes a mockery of our democratic process and the government's own stated commitment to human rights and community safety.

Allowing children as young as 10 to be held indefinitely in what are essentially concrete boxes means there are farm animals with better legal protections in Queensland than children.

Lengthy periods of detention in watch houses – which are not designed or intended to hold children, and indeed are only meant to hold adult detainees for limited amounts of time – or in adult prisons, will not result in rehabilitated children on release, which is what should be the aim if we're serious about improving community safety.

These children have complex needs. This is not a problem which can be solved overnight with rashly thought-out changes to law. We need a properly resourced, comprehensive plan to address youth offending and keep children and communities safe.

The issue of youth justice has come before parliamentary committees several times in the past few years, and each time a plethora of legal experts, community safety advocates, youth workers and services, family support services, and more, have come before those committees with solutions they know work.

Victims deserve a youth crime response that works to improve community safety. These laws will not achieve that.

**ENDS**

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