



youth affairs network qld

11th March 2021

Committee Secretary
Legal Affairs and Safety Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
lasc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Re: Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021

Dear members of the committee,

It is with a heavy heart that we write to you in relation to the proposed amendments to the Youth Justice Act and more broadly on the war waged on children and young people by members of the Queensland Parliament, police union and media.

YANQ is the peak body for the youth sector in Queensland. We represent over 680 individuals and organisation from across the State. The Network is managed by a committee made up of elected members. We promote the interests and wellbeing of young people across the state by:

- [disseminating information to members, the youth sector, and the broader community](#)
- [undertaking campaigns and lobbying](#)
- [making representations to government and other influential bodies](#)
- [resourcing regional and issues-based networks](#)
- [consulting and liaising with members and the field](#)
- [linking with key state and national bodies](#)
- [initiating research projects](#)
- [hosting forums and conferences](#)
- [input into policy development](#)
- [enhancing the professional development of the youth sector](#)

We advocate on behalf of young people in Queensland, especially disadvantaged young people, to government and the community. We encourage the development of policies and programs that respond to the rights and needs of young people.

YANQ was established by youth sector members in 1987 and Queensland Government recognised and commenced funding the peak body in 1992. This continued till 2012 when the funding of the organisation was severed due to its strong advocacy role. Governments since 2012 have failed to reinstate the organisation's funding therefore maintaining their support for silencing of the main advocacy voice for young people. The youth voice has been sidelined in our democratic processes.

Further erosion of basic principles of democracy is evident in the proposed Amendment Bill. It is so disappointing to see the mockery made of the Human Rights Act 2019 by drafters of the proposed amendments. These proposed amendments are neither reasonable nor justifiable. It took Queensland a long time to adopt a Human Rights Act and this kind of blatant disregard for this Act sets Queensland back and reaffirms the status of Queensland as Australia's backward state.

The proposed amendments to the Youth Justice Act further separate the Act from what is in children's best interest. Children who offend must be treated as children first and foremost. The Act and the proposed amendments clearly fail our children and more broadly our community. Both the Act and the proposed amendments are not based on contemporary evidence and progressive approaches to how children should be understood, treated and supported after experiencing problems that have led them to commit a crime.

The current approach of Queensland's youth justice system is not evidence based, effective, efficient or economically viable. Hundreds of millions of dollars gets wasted on an outdated system that for all intents and purposes has forsaken both the wellbeing of our children as well as our community's safety.

The continuous obsessive focus on 'offender status' in youth justice system has clearly led to further criminalisation, marginalisation by society and disengagement by some of the most vulnerable children in our community.

Considering the recent commentary by both of the major political parties we see little hope of the Queensland parliament rejecting the Amendments Bill. What is actually needed is an independent inquiry and the rewriting the Youth Justice Act to move Queensland out of the dark ages and the punitive penal colony mentality which has been the hallmark of our so-called 'justice system'.

Historically, youth workers have demonstrated that they have the skill set necessary to engage with and build trusting relationships with the cohort of young people which this bill targets. The government is not utilising the vast experience and learnings from youth workers and not taking on board any proposal put forward by this sector. The government has also been blind to the vast array of evidence-based research reports that demonstrate the efficacy of youth work in dealing with highly marginalised young people.

If the committee is interested in what an independent report could look like, we highly recommend the committee study a report released earlier this month titled [Child First Justice: The Research Evidence-base](#).

The report's author, Professor Stephen Case, is an expert in criminology at Loughborough University. Informed by a comprehensive review of international sources of literature, the report presents the research evidence-base for Child First as a complete model of practice and in relation to its four individual, interacting tenets. Each section collates, discusses and evaluates the principle of Child First in terms of their underpinning theories (e.g. causes of offending, programme change mechanisms, their basis in national and international policies/strategies including children's rights instruments), and their related empirical research evidence-bases from the field of youth justice and associated areas (e.g. childhood and youth studies, policing, social work, health). Case studies and operational examples are integrated throughout to illustrate the research evidence-base in practice. The evidence collected and reported on brings longstanding, multi-disciplinary research evidence-bases related to each tenet and the associated emerging practical (research) evidence-base to support the Child First model of youth justice.

In conclusion we urge to the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee to take on board all evidence on hand and fulfil its democratic duty to reject the proposed amendments as they are not in the best interest of our children or the community. The proposed amendments will only increase the number of children in the youth prisons leading to overcrowding, overflow to watch houses and eventually building of more youth prisons. All of which will only act as a pipeline to the adult criminal justice system.

If you require any further information and/or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



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This submission has been endorsed by the executive committee of YANQ which represents 680 individuals and organisations state wide.