

Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk  
Premier of Queensland  
1 William St  
BRISBANE Q 4000

Hon Mark Ryan  
Minister for Police and Corrective Services  
1 William St  
BRISBANE Q 4000

Hon Di Farmer  
Minister for Employment and Small Business, Training  
and Skills Development, and Youth Justice,  
1 William St  
BRISBANE Q 4000



30 August 2023

Dear Premier Palaszczuk, Minister Ryan and Minister Farmer,

I am writing on behalf of ANTaR Queensland in response to your Government's recent changes to legislation making it legal for children to be held in adult watchhouses.

I understand that the Government is attempting to respond, and be seen to respond, to genuine community concern about violent crime, particularly in light of some high-profile but isolated cases in the past year. Nevertheless, as I am sure you are aware and as numerous evidence-based, expert assessments outline, this response is fundamentally counter-productive. Children and young people who have been caught up in minor misdemeanours, who are mentally ill, intellectually disabled or suffering from trauma or compounded disadvantage will end up in seriously under-resourced adult watch houses. This response will further damage many lives and further entrench a raft of costly social problems. It can be expected to intensify the problem of violent crime, not reduce it. Your Government itself recognised this by moving children out of police watch houses four years ago.

Allowing children to be held in police watch houses does not contribute to resolving a complex, long-term problem. Moreover, it is a response that is undertaken at the expense of many vulnerable people's lives. In effect, children are being sacrificed so that the Government can manage a legal dilemma and be seen to be doing something.

The Government has committed itself to the Path to Treaty. It has passed legislation which requires that its actions are in accord with a Path to Treaty. Given the excessively high percentage of young Murrin in detention, the recent legislation is definitely not in accord with the Path to Treaty but will simply entrench intergenerational disadvantage and trauma. The need to override the Human Rights Act also makes it very clear that this change in policy is fundamentally destructive – that it is not in accord with very basic human rights provisions, including not engaging in torture.

Is the Government's commitment to 'reframing the relationship with First Nations Queenslanders' and to respecting basic human rights so weak that it is prepared to ditch these fundamental commitments in the face of electoral pressure? What does Labor politics stand for, if it cannot work with communities over the long term to find alternative approaches to youth crime and community safety that do not breach basic human rights standards? We are aware that the Government is supporting some alternative approaches, but these efforts have been relatively minor and scattered. They are not part of a committed, coherent strategy sufficiently resourced to deal with the complex problems highlighted by youth crime. An issue that raises such fundamental, long-term questions about community safety, human rights and relations between First Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians requires real purpose, planning and connecting with communities.

We call on the Government to rescind this legislation and to instead commit to long-term, wide-ranging efforts to genuinely support community safety, uphold human rights and pursue a new relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Anne Brown', written in a cursive style.

M. Anne Brown  
ANTaR Queensland