



Minister for Police and Community Safety

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Dear Mr Jones and Ms Walker

I refer to your further correspondence dated 15 December 2023.

The Queensland Government is working to increase youth detention centre capacity so that young people remanded by the courts are detained in custody facilities appropriate to their individual circumstances.

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) works in collaboration with Queensland Health, the Department of Youth Justice, and other partner agencies and community services both to ensure high standards are maintained with respect to all persons in custody and to actively manage capacity across the state, transferring people between watchhouses where needed to ensure the safety, health, and welfare needs of those in custody are met.

The Queensland Government acknowledges it is not in the best interests of young people to be remanded in custody for extensive periods of time. To address this issue, the Queensland Government funded a fast-track sentencing trial. Preliminary results of the trial indicate many young people are being dealt with more expeditiously, resulting in reduced times in custody on remand.

The *Youth Justice Act 1992*, Schedule 1 – Charter of youth justice principals (5) states: “If a child commits an offence, the child should be treated in a way that diverts the child away from the courts’ criminal justice system, unless the nature of the offence and the child’s criminal history indicating that a proceeding for the offence should be started”. This principal applies also if a child commits a breach of bail offence.

The minimum age of criminal responsibility has been subject to national discussion and as you have indicated, some Australian jurisdictions have committed to increasing the minimum age of criminal responsibility, within their jurisdiction. The Queensland Government has considered this issue through the findings of the Community Support and Services Committee in its consideration of a relevant Bill in 2021. The Committee received 78 submissions and held a public hearing. From all the information available, the Committee found:

“Considering all evidence before the committee and noting the importance of appropriately balancing the welfare of children with community safety, as well as the need to address the complex problems that give rise to children entering the justice system, the committee considers there is more work to be done before the minimum age of criminal responsibility is raised in Queensland.”

Multi-agency collaborative panels also ensure intensive case management and holistic support is provided for young people identified as high risk and requiring a collaborative approach. There are 18 multi-agency collaborative panels or similar stakeholder groups currently operating across Queensland.

As you are aware, it is important to break the cycle of offending, understand and address the underlying causes of youth crime. The Queensland Government is committed to expansion of intensive case management, early action groups and grassroots early intervention. We are investing into programs proven to make a difference in diverting young people away from the criminal justice system.

The Government has been working at a national level to find how children can be better diverted from the criminal justice system and have better programs and better ways instead of incarcerating children who commit serious offences.

An On-Country program delivered by non-government service providers in Cairns, Mount Isa and Townsville provides a culture-based rehabilitation program for young First Nations peoples with complex needs. These providers are working with 65% of young people assessed as high or very high-risk of re-offending. Early findings show that On-Country is a relevant service that is valued by First Nations peoples and communities.

Project Booyah is a QPS youth mentoring program that uses adventure-based learning, leadership skills, decision making and problem-solving exercises, resilience training, policing strategies, and family inclusive principles to help young people aged from 14-17 years make better life choices. Project Booyah is currently operating in 11 sites across Queensland including Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Nambour, Moreton, Inala, Logan, Gold Coast, Ipswich, and Toowoomba. Project Booyah is an early intervention program that ultimately aims to prevent or reduce child offending and victimisation.

The QPS advises Project Booyah has shown success with approximately 83% of the participants completing the program and, of that group, 74% re-engage with education, 39% undertake vocational training, and 32% obtain employment. Partnerships with community-based organisations, such as East Coast Apprenticeships, offer opportunities to further enhance these young people's lives and help them work towards making better life choices through having meaningful and rewarding careers.

Should your office require further information, Mr Paul Keene, Acting Chief of Staff, is available on 3035 8300.

Yours sincerely



The Honourable Mark Ryan MP
Minister for Police and Community Safety