



Honourable Yvette D'Ath MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
Minister for Training and Skills

In reply please quote: # 3547302

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Level 36
1 William Street Brisbane
GPO Box 149 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3719 7400
Email attorney@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
Cnr Alice and George Streets
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to petitions 2675-16 and 2654-16 tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 1 December 2016, requesting a street curfew in Townsville to address youth crime. I thank the petitioners for their suggestion and interest in this matter.

The *Youth Justice Act 1992* (the Act) applies to young people aged 10-16 years of age who commit offences in Queensland. Legislation was recently passed to amend the Act to include 17 year olds. This amendment will commence in 12 months to allow for the necessary transitional arrangements to be implemented.

I share Townsville residents' concern about their young people and youth offending. Although statistics do not reveal significant changes in the levels of young people and youth committing crime in Townsville, I agree that this type of offending is a serious issue and residents should feel safe in their community.

In Townsville, one percent of the youth population was charged with an offence between April 2015 and March 2016. Forty young individuals are responsible for half of all offending in the region. Most of the offending (67 percent) relates to burglary, theft, unauthorised use of motor vehicles and related offences. Violent offences account for only seven percent of crime committed by young people.

It is also important to note that less than one percent of all 10 -16 year olds in Queensland ever become involved in the youth justice system. Half of the children and young people who do engage with the youth justice system do not return after their first court finalisation.

Young people who are at greatest risk of becoming repeat offenders typically experience significant disadvantage in their lives. It is this disadvantage that has the greatest influence on increasing the risk that they will re-offend. Most of these children experience a dysfunctional family environment and involvement in the child safety system; homelessness or unsuitable accommodation; substance misuse; mental health disorders; behavioural disorders; disability; and high levels of disengagement from education and training.

Young people who offend will continue to be held to account for their behaviour under the Act. Acknowledging, the issues and disadvantage that contribute to their offending is important because they point to the interventions that will be most effective in reducing re-offending. Research shows that in order to reduce a young person's risk of reoffending, the underlying causes of their offending must be addressed. They must also be assisted to achieve stability in their lives.

It is important to note also, that the Police will retain their powers to charge and prosecute a young person where there has been a breach of the law and the courts have an independent discretion to impose appropriate sentences.

I share the petitioners' concerns for the safety of all concerned when children and young people are out late at night unsupervised. Under the Act imposing a curfew already exists as an option. A court can impose a curfew on a specific child as a condition of a youth justice order. A youth curfew which applies to all young people could however, have the undesired effect of drawing more young people into the youth justice system.

Youth curfews have been common in the United States since the early 1990's. A recent systematic review of research on the effectiveness of those curfews did not show they were effective in reducing crime and victimisation¹.

The Queensland Government is determined to ensure that Townsville residents feel safer in their community, and implement effective measures to address youth offending. A number of new initiatives have been announced to tackle crime and in particular crime involving young people and youth in Townsville.

The Queensland Police Service has acted to deter offending and restore community confidence by implementing targeted police responses. Operation Oscar Merchant stepped up the capacity of local police to conduct high visibility intelligence-led policing operations. Now that this operation is complete, additional police will continue to be deployed in Townsville to keep up the momentum. They will be able to use the intelligence already gathered to target repeat offenders, and continue to develop new plans for addressing issues as they emerge.

On 24 November 2016, Police Minister Mark Ryan and Commissioner Ian Stewart announced a new Chief Superintendent position for Townsville. The new role is aimed at introducing an extra layer to assist frontline and operational police in making Townsville a safer community.

The Townsville Stronger Communities initiative is backing up these targeted police actions by taking coordinated action to prevent crime. Community members and local organisations are being engaged so that they can apply their local knowledge to local issues, including, for example, getting young people job-ready through education and training.

¹ Wilson, D. B., Gill, C., Olaghare, A., & McClure, D. Juvenile Curfew Effects on Criminal Behaviour and Victimization: A Systematic Review. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2016:3

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On 9 December 2016, the Honourable Coralee O'Rourke MP, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Seniors and Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland, announced tough new measures to tackle young people and youth offending in Townsville. The Community Youth Response will ramp up efforts through the courts and use intensive case management, diversion measures, community services, education and training and cultural mentoring programs to address young people and youth offending. This will be a more targeted approach which will make young offenders more accountable for the crimes they commit and give something back to the community.

Under this new approach, experienced Children's Court magistrates will deal directly with young offenders, looking closely at the individual circumstances and applying the most appropriate penalty. Other key measures include a court stakeholder steering committee and youth collaborative panel. The steering committee will be led by the magistrate and include representatives from key government and non-government agencies.

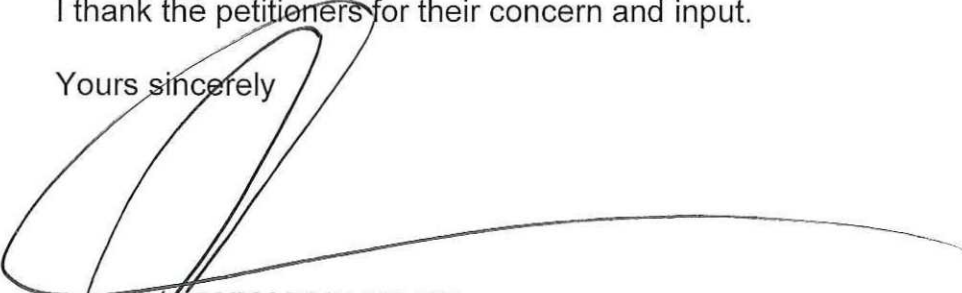
Dedicated case managers will work closely with young people and their families to develop plans regarding support needs and commence interventions to reduce offending. Counselling and referrals to deal with alcohol and drug dependency as well as mental health issues are also a key feature of the new approach.

Government and non-government services are working closely together to be more effective in supporting young people and their families. More than 50 local non-government organisation will join the Townsville Stronger Communities Action Group to assist in the efforts to deal with local crime. This will allow for a greater coordination of services for at risk young people and youths as well as their families. The collaboration between government and non-government services will address many of the causes of youth offending.

The Government is working hard to improve community safety in Townsville and achieve better outcomes for these children and young people as well as increasing the wellbeing of Townsville residents. This type of long-term, systemic change cannot reasonably be achieved overnight, however it is the only way to ensure lasting results.

I thank the petitioners for their concern and input.

Yours sincerely



DR ANTHONY LYNHAM MP
Acting Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
Acting Minister for Training and Skills