

MEMBER FOR NOOSA
STATEMENT
YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM SELECT COMMITTEE

I wish to advise the House about the progress of the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee.

The committee has been working towards the completion and tabling of an interim report after 6 months of inquiry incorporating twenty-six meetings, thirteen public hearings, nine public briefings, two hundred and twenty submissions and site visits.

As Chair, I have endeavoured every step of the way to work patiently, impartially and collaboratively with both sides to achieve a balanced, nonpartisan report on many contentious issues, in a difficult environment of heightened media and politicking with the upcoming elections. This has not been easy.

Prior to commencing the drafting of a report, the committee had workshopped the content on three occasions.

Even though there was consensus within the committee that Queensland's youth justice system is not meeting the community's expectations with regard to community safety and the rehabilitation of children and young people, and that earlier intervention is required, members views on how best to address these has proved to be polarising.

Because of this I have sought to achieve compromises in efforts to reach a bipartisan agreement.

This has included three extensions of time granted for members to consider the draft interim report and issues raised throughout the inquiry by submitters, witnesses and by members.

Since the release of the draft four weeks ago, I have repeatedly asked committee members to articulate in writing what they want to delete, amend or insert into the report including recommendations so these can be considered. Where received they have incorporated for discussion, however there have also been broad statements of objection which have been difficult to translate into specific amendments with requests to the writers to articulate further either ignored or brushed off. In addition, statements that a report will not be agreed unless it includes recommendations that clearly will not receive consensus.

Despite the workshops, multiple meetings and extensions over a number of weeks to consider and approve the draft report, at the adoption meeting yesterday the report failed to achieve a majority under the current rules. This even though significant amendments had been accomplished, and the ability to raise any concerns via a statement of dissent or reservation as standard.

Of note, I believe the vast majority of the 55 recommendations would have been approved as they had not been raised as requiring amendments or of concern.

That we have not delivered a bipartisan agreement as needed by Queenslanders, has been deeply disappointing.

An outcome where there is no report tabled, especially given that we have developed and agreed on many substantive comments and recommendations, is unacceptable.

It is for these reasons that I stand here to seek the Parliaments support to amend the voting rules agreed by the House on 12 October 2023 for this Youth Justice Reform Select Committee. Those rules provide that a question before the committee is decided by a majority of the votes of members present and voting, plus one other member.

This differs from the usual committee voting rule that a question is decided by a simple majority and, as articulated in Standing Order 203, that the Chair has a deliberative, or casting, vote in the event of an equality of votes.

Without amendment to that rule specified in the order of appointment of the committee on 12 October 2023, I believe that an interim report may never be tabled, regardless of any further time or efforts.

There has already been six months of work by Parliamentary staff and Members of Parliament at cost to tax payers, efforts of all who submitted including victims, as well the many who have attended public hearings. That a report is not made public is again, not acceptable to Queenslanders.

This has been one of the hardest requests I have ever made in this Chamber, as I genuinely believed that with members focused on greater safety for our communities, a bipartisan approach would be, as committed to, achieved. Even if there were components disagreed to, at least to ensure that the interim report was tabled would reflect this intent. It would also have shown transparently the areas agreed, as well disagreed to, and the reasons why there is some urgency with recommendations that needed to be implemented as soon as possible.

This out of respect for all who seek greater safety. There is no valid reason to block, stall or put barriers to facts and solutions reaching public domain.

Even though I have requested this amendment, it will not diminish my efforts regarding broader committee reform. In fact, it reiterates the importance of moving to a system that works as a norm for agreement, versus disagreement. You can only do this with practice, and as we have seen, doing so infrequently makes it difficult for some members to move from 'combative' to 'collaboratively'.

Especially when it comes to such critical issues such as youth crime which if not addressed appropriately, can lead to even greater trauma for our communities. This is not something to use for political purposes, and an interim report must be made public in the interests of greater safety now, and into the future.