



QUEENSLAND COUNCIL FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

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Watching Them While They're Watching You

MEDIA RELEASE

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Youth Detention – a root and branch review of bail system is needed

“The fact that children are being held for long periods of time in watch houses tells us that the system has failed” said QCCL President Michael Cope.

We know that 80% of children in youth detention in Queensland are on remand. We also know that only about 16% of those people go on to receive a custodial sentence. Therefore, the vast majority of them are spending an unnecessary amount of time in detention.

“We know, that detention has substantial adverse effects on the future life chances of children. Prisons and youth detention centres are the universities of crime. Every step needs to be taken to keep children out of them” said Mr Cope.

The QCCL accepts that the government has made substantial steps in trying to address the issue of youth detention. However, the fact that the system is overflowing indicates that there are structural flaws.

“The Minister points to decisions of Magistrates as being the reason so many children are in detention. However, the Magistrates are only applying the law. This would point to the fact, that what is needed is a root and branch review of the law of bail as it relates to children.”

Over the years, one of the most difficult issues in granting bail to children has been ensuring that they have appropriate accommodation. Last year, the government announced the Supervised Bail Accommodation service to reduce the number of young people in detention on remand.

“It is time, that the government assumed *legislative* responsibility for placing young people in suitable accommodation, when they are required to do so by bail conditions.” says Mr Cope

Mr Cope says, “The Council also calls upon the government to implement the recommendation of former police Commissioner Bob Atkinson, that the age of criminal responsibility be raised to the internationally recommended age of 12.”

“The solution to this problem, is not to build more cells, but to stop children ending up in detention. The government should divert the money it proposes to spend on more detention cells into early intervention and prevention,” said Mr Cope

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