



February 2023

Moderator
Rev Andrew Gunton

Committee Secretary
Economics and Governance Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Committee Secretary,

Inquiry into the Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023

The Uniting Church in Australia Queensland Synod (Queensland Synod) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Economic and Governance Committee on the Inquiry into the *Strengthening Community Safety Bill 2023*. The Queensland Synod is committed to contributing to services and programs aimed at prevention and early intervention for children and young people and their families, who are experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. We are a general member of the national #Raise the Age alliance and the Queensland Raise the Age Leadership Group. Please find attached our Youth Justice Statement.

We are deeply concerned about the proposed youth justice reforms introduced to Parliament this week. Contrary to views presented in the media, crime data shows that there has been a decline in the size of the youth offender population in Queensland over the past two decades. We are also surprised at the lack of consultation with experts including First Nations communities, to inform the changes to youth justice laws in Queensland. We ask the Committee to advocate interventions that are evidence based long-lasting solutions, rather than a reaction to the highly-publicised perceived need for a 'stronger' response.

Particularly concerning is the removal of protections for young people contained in the Queensland Human Rights Act. Despite this unprecedented removal, Queensland has obligations to promote and protect the human rights of young people under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Australia is a signatory. These obligations include that detention must be a used only as a mechanism of last resort.

We are disappointed at the focus on detention as a solution, when research consistently shows that detention produces higher rates of recidivism than supportive, community-based interventions. In



addition, there is a lack of action to immediately address the conditions for youth offenders in detention.

If we address family issues at an early stage and provide evidence-based, therapeutic, flexible, and innovative support for children, we have a better chance of reducing youth offending and increasing the wellbeing and security of the whole community rather than entrenching the disadvantage through incarceration which marginalises and traumatises at-risk youth.

The Queensland Synod would welcome future opportunities to discuss this submission further. Should you require any more information, I can be contacted on 07 3377 9705.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Andrew Gunton
Moderator, Uniting Church in Australia Queensland Synod

Attachment: Youth Justice Statement