

**Submission
No 164**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Name: Mr Peter Gill
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Partially
Confidential

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Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities

This submission is lodged on a personal and individual basis.

I am resident in a major regional centre. Over the years I/we have been affected at times (fortunately infrequently) by crime and anti-social behavior. This has (apart from physical) effects on the psychological sense of feeling safe and secure. It has required expenditure on security upgrades.

Certain information on my background is redacted.

I have attempted to reply in accord with the terms of reference below. The making of my response is brief by necessity of readability, space and time. I would be happy to provide further detail if requested.

Overview:

My view is that current Community Safety efforts are hampered by:

- Lack of a holistic approach both locally and state wide between Courts, Social Work/Justice, Police, Education
- Resourcing issues – Police, Social Work, Diversionary Paths
- Age of responsibility
- The Education system
- A dis-connect between Court outcomes and community expectations,
- Lack of juvenile custody facilities locally
- Lack of Drug/Alcohol specific facilities
- Lack of accountability applied to offenders at a personal level
- Behavioral outcomes within the Education system
- Poor parenting

I am a strong believer that personal responsibility needs to be sought from offenders and that there be a structured delivery of consequences for offenders. Personally I tend to the stronger consequence of incarceration rather than the diversionary approach, however, I am open to successful diversionary pathways being employed if they are able to demonstrate effectiveness. In that sense I am inclined to a 1,2,3 approach unless the nature of crime was of a serious nature.

Appreciating that young offenders who reform can suffer in later life from a “record” I propose that all are processed through the justice/corrective system. My proposal is that once diversionary programs and detention are completed and subject to an ensuing period of good behavior any “records” are expunged. This in my view provides an incentive to reformation.

That the Committee on Law and Safety inquire into and report on:

- (a) the drivers of youth crime across regional and rural NSW, particularly since the COVID pandemic;
- A failure to adopt a holistic approach across the many agencies to work in unison.
 - Breakdown of liaison between agencies, for a multitude of reasons, eg availability in location, resourcing, staff experience, staff continuity.
 - Rapport with staff is an important part of the connection necessary in dealing with offenders and their support mechanism.
 - Lack of progressive sentencing (including diversionary approaches) presenting a structured escalation against re-offending.
 - In my town, there are no youth detention facilities, Police resources are expended transporting detainees to closest (basically vehicle plus 2 officers taking a whole shift), leads to a negative bias to not grant bail. Whilst officers perform this work on overtime without affecting rostered resources, the effect may be through fatigue and rostering around fatigue.
 - Education
 - Behavior, despite there being some bright spots of enhanced behavioral change, as the system depends on a school by school approach there are “levels” of accomplishment.
 - It is my belief that interest and engagement of students is an integral part of their learning. Time at school constitutes a significant part of a student’s socialization time and can be the source of bad associations and poor behavior traits (learned or developed) which are then carried over into society.
 - Currently in NSW we have a progression from Pre-school to Primary to High Schools with progression to TAFE and Tertiary Education.
 - High Schools have a focus on academic pathway with the aim of students staying to year 12.
 - In the later years of High School any students who partake of vocational options (VET or School Based Apprenticeships suffer due to programming conflicts with their other lessons and often miss out on lessons.
 - Students who have no intention of proceeding to TAFE or Tertiary remain within the system and have a high propensity to become un-interested and dis-affected. There is little to maintain their interest, hence there is a pathway to disruptive, anti-social and criminal behavior.
 - It is my view that implementation of “Technical High Schools” either as standalone or incorporated into TAFE would serve to mitigate disruptive, anti-social and criminal behavior. I would envisage this happening from year 10. This concept could also assist with skills shortages in the non-trade area as for example training could cover retail, logistics, agricultural/horticultural skills
- (b) how a whole of government approach can reduce the drivers and root causes of youth crime in regional and rural NSW;
- Better coordination between all agencies involved to ensure consistent approach, actions and outcomes.
 - Consistency in service and focus on ensuring people do not “fall between the cracks”.
 - Develop and monitor a dashboard reporting process coordinating the efforts of all agencies where those of individual agencies feed into the overall summary.
 - Improve and strengthen monitoring and reporting requirements for each agency where progress on every individual is able to be compiled.
- (c) the wraparound and diversionary services available for youth and families in the regions and rural areas and how they can be better matched to individuals, measured, improved and integrated into a coordinated approach to divert youth from crime, having regard to the NSW Government’s commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal people;
- The judicial system must be an integral part in the integration. If necessary, issues around the separation of powers may need to be addressed.
 - In my town more services are needed in Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol and Domestic Violence. There is a tendency to aggregate these under “Mental Health”, it remains my belief that they are separate and require different approaches. A Mental Health facility is under construction and the need for Drug and Alcohol facilities is being heavily promoted.
 - With many services a “one size fits all” is not necessarily the best approach. Nuances in the services provided and personal rapport can influence the uptake and outcome individual by individual.
 - It would be optimal use of resources if Aboriginal and Non-aboriginal services were combined – allowing for cultural sensitivities.
 - Many services in this sector are funded incrementally leading to a “hand to mouth” existence which then compromises long term commitment.

- My suggestion is that such services be funded on a rolling basis with a provision which limits the amount by which ongoing funding may be reduced year to year.
 - Measurement improvement and integration - as raised in b) above.
- (d) staffing levels and workforce issues, including police staffing, in regional and rural areas and how services can be improved to reduce youth crime in these areas
- My region suffers from resource shortfalls in the Police, Justice and Social Work areas.
 - Additionally “experience” is in high demand.
 - Overwork, burnout and low morale are commonly described issues leading to poor retention.
 - From the Police perspective the dog squad is a valuable tool which suffers from being a singular resource without backup and multi shift coverage. An improvement in this aspect would be beneficial.
 - Country service allocations have been and remain problematic in that many may use country service as an entry pathway to their career and move on once experience is gained. Attraction and retention issues need addressing. Using the larger centres as a hub incurs staff travel time, accommodation requirements (expense) and many staff are un-willing to spend time away from their families. There are issues with night driving (animal strikes, fatigue and a tendency for staff to perform the travel in their own time. It would be optimal to have staff reside where the role is. To the extent possible salary packaging and benefits are the most oft used tool, however, promotion opportunities could also be factored into the benefits.
- (e) recidivism rates in regional and rural areas, and related impacts on the community, services and law enforcement;
- For my town there were a lot of cases where multiple grants of bail were being breached. There was a feeling that the provision of Bail and recidivism were a “round robin” and that judgement outcomes were no in accord with community expectations.
 - The recent tightening of bail for some of the more serious property crimes has in my view produced a downward trend.
 - Impacts on the community were notable, the major aspect being break and enter, steal vehicle keys, steal the vehicle and engage in Police pursuits, then dump and burn the stolen vehicle.
- (f) the range of functions being performed by NSW police officers, including mental health assistance and youth welfare, on behalf of other agencies in regional and rural areas, and the supports required to assist police; and
- For my town Police are augmented by a range of services/facilities.
 - Local Police perform juvenile transport to the nearest juvenile detention facility.
- (g) any other related matter.
- Legal Age of Responsibility
 - I do not support increasing the current age to 14 years.
 - Bail
 - I regard Bail as a privilege and that only one chance should prevail.
 - Poor parenting
 - This may come about from Domestic Violence, relationship breakdown, substance abuse.
 - Unfortunately any benefit of intervention is subject to a 20year cycle, it may take several cycles to provide benefit. This does not mean that efforts not be made, rather that the results may take longer to eventuate.
 - Social work support and intervention is about as much as can be accomplished.
 - Personal Accountability
 - I would like to see more emphasis on miscreants being made to accept responsibility for their actions both as part of interventions, diversionary programs and in the court system.
 - Following above, I form the impression that many appear to have a lawyer do their bidding. It remains my opinion that such representation negates the taking of responsibility by the perpetrator.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Peter Gill
31 May 2024