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POLITICS QUEENSLAND JUSTICE

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Advocates have claimed children are being kept in "glass cages" and only allowed 15 minutes' exercise a day in Queensland watchhouses.

Disturbing revelations have come to light about children being held in maximum-security police watchhouses "like animals" [for weeks](#), with [limited access to outdoor air and education](#).



Several groups have had their say on a Queensland government bill which was introduced to get children out of watchhouses sooner. QUEENSLAND POLICE MEDIA

In response, the Palaszczuk government created a standalone Department of [Youth Justice](#) to focus on the issue, announced a new [32-bed youth detention centre and introduced a bill](#) to move young people out of adult watchhouses faster.

The proposed laws would require detained children to be brought before a court within 24 hours, stop them being locked up solely because they were homeless and introduce special protections for children under the age of 14.

In a submission to a parliamentary committee considering the bill, the Youth Advocacy Centre has described the situation as a "crisis", with children being held for lengthy periods in maximum security cells designed for adults.

YAC staff who visited a watchhouse said the only exercise option was 15 to 60 minutes a day in a small courtyard with high walls and no vegetation.

"Aside from that, the children are effectively in glass cages for days on end with very little to do," the YAC submission reads.

"For young women in particular, using the toilet or shower with exposure to cameras viewed by male staff is problematic.

"Due to the layout of the watchhouse, adult detainees and children can be visible and audible to each other."

Queensland Human Rights Commissioner Scott McDougall said additional measures were needed to protect the human rights of children who came into contact with the youth justice system.

Mr McDougall recommended the age of criminal responsibility be increased to 12 years and the minimum age of detention be raised to 14 years.

Queensland's Public Guardian Natalie Siegel-Brown and the Australian Lawyers Alliance also argued the minimum age of detention be raised to 14 years, while the Queensland Family and Child Commission said the minimum age of criminal responsibility should be raised to at least 12 years.

Currently, children as young as 10 can be kept in Queensland's youth detention centres.

Queensland Ombudsman Phil Clarke said courts may need more resources so they could deal with cases faster.

"I support the view that young people should not be remanded in custody simply because they do not have adequate accommodation arrangements," he said.

"If no accommodation exists, then it will be incumbent on the child protection system to operate expeditiously to ensure safe and suitable accommodation to support an affected young person, in the absence of a parent or guardian, is available."

As of July 3, there were 34 children in Queensland's watchhouses, of which 27 were on remand, meaning they had not been convicted of a crime.

From March this year, funding has been allocated to make sure at least two teachers and a teacher aide deliver education to young people at the Brisbane watchhouse, Education Minister Grace revealed in a recent answer to an LNP question on notice.