



NORTHERN TERRITORY

Youth bail laws pass parliament after lengthy debate

After a marathon debate that stretched well into Tuesday evening, the NT parliament has passed controversial youth bail laws into law.

THOMAS MORGAN, NT News

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CONTROVERSIAL youth bail laws have passed into law after a lengthy debate in NT parliament on Tuesday, but key changes have been made.

But the Bill has been slammed from both sides as being either “watered down” or creating more generations of criminals.

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The new Bill includes measures to crack down on repeat youth offenders including the presumption against bail being applied to a number of prescribed offences.

Police Minister Nicole Manison said the reforms were about targeting the small minority responsible for the majority of crimes.

“We know that 16 per cent of (youths) commit 50 per cent of the offences, and it’s important to make sure people are accountable to their bail conditions,” Ms Manison said.

“That is exactly what this legislation does,” she said.

Ms Manison however said she wanted to maintain “strong options for diversion” for youths.

She also said an amendment introduced yesterday would allow judges to take into account “exceptional circumstances” when assessing whether to revoke bail.



Deputy CM and Police Minister Nicole Manison and NT Police Commissioner Jamie Chalker with new trainee officers at the Peter McCaulay Centre. Picture Glenn Campbell

The changes came after feedback from criminal lawyers and advocacy groups.

Territory Families Minister Kate Worden however said the changes were “based on operational intelligence”.

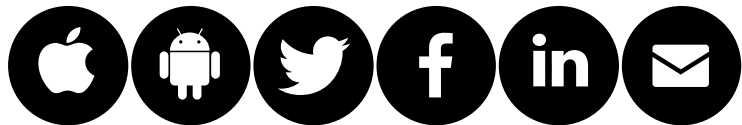
“We have closed the loopholes today that can lead to unintended consequences over the last few years,” Ms Worden said.

“You will be held to account, you will face consequences of your behaviour, and we have a system to support you and your families, to make a better decision and choose a better path.”

Protesters out the front of the NT parliament last week slammed the laws as “racist” and feared it would perpetuate the cycle of crime through generations.

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Independent MLA Robyn Lambley said the NT government had “backflipped” on its stance 18 months ago, when they argued “locking children and hoping they will change was never a smart approach”.

“We’re all left scratching our heads thinking ‘what do these people really stand for?’”

CLP leader Lia Finocchiaro took the floor to tear the Bill apart, saying it does not go far enough to tackle repeat offending and has a number of technical flaws.

“This Bill is so weak,” Ms Finocchiaro said. “There are plenty of places to hide in the legislation.

“The trickier you make it, the more carve-outs you put in, people will find a way (to offend).”

Ms Finocchiaro said the “devil was in the detail” and accused the government of watering down the legislation.



📷 Opposition Leader, Lia Finocchiaro addresses the media with a preview of Parliamentary sittings.
Picture Glenn Campbell

“What amounts to a serious breach of bail is extremely, extremely limited,” she said. “The devil is in the detail and the detail is certainly coming home to roost today, Madam Speaker.”

In parliament on Tuesday, Ms Finocchiaro and deputy CLP leader Gerard Maley grilled the government on whether youths who failed to turn up to a court appearance would automatically have their bail revoked.

Ms Finocchiaro said the government’s legislation did not reflect a promise made by Ms Manison on March 23 “that their bail would be automatically revoked”.

She said the promise was a “puff piece” and “an absolute joke”.

Chief Minister Michael Gunner, however, defended the changes, saying failing to appear in court was a “breach of bail conditions” and would be treated as a serious offence by judges.

The laws passed after lengthy debate in the parliament last night.

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