

**CASUARINA PRISON — UNIT 18 DETAINEES**

*Statement*

**HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan)** [5.37 pm]: I rise to speak quickly, in the remaining five minutes, to reflect on an issue that has certainly been of concern to me and, I think, many in the community that has evolved further this week. I refer to the detention of juvenile detainees in maximum security at Casuarina Prison, otherwise known as unit 18.

On Friday, the President of the Children’s Court, Judge Quail, described the situation there as “barbaric”, “cruel”, and “a form of child abuse”, actually warning that the government could be found in contempt of court. Judge Quail made these comments when sentencing two teenagers to non-custodial sentences. On the back of that, the Premier criticised the courts and the judge for those sentences, arguing that the community might be justifiably aggrieved, and that these sentences should have been custodial and more proportionate to the crimes that had been committed. We are now finding ourselves in a situation whereby we have a system that is entirely broken, and the courts are, quite rationally, responding by not putting children into situations that are barbaric, cruel and inhumane.

I got an answer yesterday to a question without notice that shows that many of these young people are spending more than 20 hours a day locked alone in a cell, with nothing to do, no education and no rehabilitation. Some are spending more than 23 hours in a cell. This is a broken system. No wonder judges are very reluctant to lock these kids away.

There is a solution to this, which is why I am standing up; it is part of my frustration. It is about investment in the right things. There are two things, and I will be quick in the time I have left. Firstly, we simply need a whole bunch of stuff around rehabilitation to keep these kids out. That is about shifting government resources to focus on that problem. This is a Labor government. I know it is something that Labor governments do and are passionate about. I think that, unfortunately, the prison sector as a whole is in trouble and we need to get in front of that as a state that disproportionately locks people away. The second point is more tangible. It is about Banksia Hill Detention Centre. Hon Dr Brian Walker, Hon Wilson Tucker and I did a tour there. The facility needs big investment now so that it can hold kids, some of whom clearly need special and proper treatment. They are not able to get proper treatment there. It is not fit for service. There is no funding planned for Banksia Hill until 2024–25. We have a problem now. My appeal here is to get on and prioritise it—make it urgent. Otherwise, judges will keep doing what they have done this week. They will not put kids in Banksia Hill because they know they will end up in unit 18 or be locked down for 20 hours a day. That is not something that should go on. In fact, we need a solution. That requires a change of course and a change of priorities, not kicking the can down the road for some kind of funding in 2024–25. That is my plea in my short member’s statement today.