

Qld change welcomed



YOUTH justice advocates have welcomed the end to Queensland's "irrational and unfair" practice of locking up 17-year-olds in adult jails within the next year.

Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk's Government has introduced legislation into Parliament to move the inmates – a great many of them Indigenous – into the youth justice system within 12 months.

"It is the right thing to do," she said.

"We cannot have a situation where Queensland is the only state in this nation

that is treating 17-year-olds differently."

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service Qld chief executive Shane Duffy said he was overwhelmed by the announcement.

"The most important part about that is we're going to be working with the Government as key stakeholders," he said.

"I think 12 months is a big ask, but nevertheless the commitment's there."

Youth Advocacy Centre director Janet Wight said she had almost given up hope of the day arriving, with the centre lobbying for change since 1992.

"Twelve months is at least a time

commitment – we've never had that time commitment," she said.

Ms Wight said the move was good for the children and good for the community.

"Seventeen-year-olds are children," she said. "You can't vote, you can't buy a drink, but apparently you can be held responsible as an adult for your criminal actions. That is irrational and it is unfair."

The Government says it will set up a Cabinet sub-committee to work through the complexities of the move, including the possible need for extra inmate accommodation.

It will mean an extra 50 inmates are added to the state's youth justice system, which already has about 150 youths in its care, some as young as 10 and many of them Aboriginal.

Sisters Inside chief executive Debbie Kilroy recalled once being locked up as a 17-year-old in 1988 as a "highly traumatising" experience.

"Now I'm a lawyer," she said. "We can change our lives and if we don't traumatise children we will get the best out of them and our community."

Queensland courts will continue to place 17-year-olds in adult jails until the proposed law is in place. – AAP