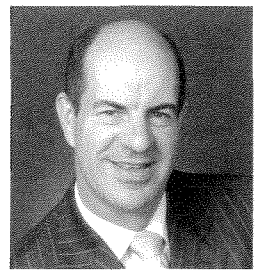


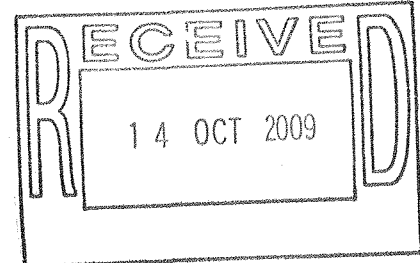


Kelvin Thomson MP
Labor Member for Wills



Monday 5th October 2009/ac

The Hon Annette Ellis MP
Chairperson
Standing Committee on Family, Community,
Housing and Youth
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Submission No. 10

(Youth Violence)

A.O.C. Date: 15/10/09

Dear Ms Ellis

Thank you for your letter to me dated 10th September inviting me to make a submission to the House of Representatives Committee Inquiry into the impact of Violence on Young Australians. As your letter points out, while often seen as the perpetrators of public violence, young people are frequently also the victims. In my view, the increasing rates of anti social behaviour, binge drinking, illicit drug consumption and violent behaviour have a direct correlation with the proliferation of more late night venues and liquor licences. Young people are not only victims with regard to violent behaviour, but they are also victims because of the failure of policy makers to recognise that more late night pubs and clubs means more trouble on our streets.

My home town of Melbourne has a very serious problem of violent and anti social behaviour in the CBD. Over the last few years the rates of hospital admissions to emergency departments and the rates of assaults are increasing (Houston 2009). This is simply not acceptable and cannot be tolerated. In the 2007-08 financial year, there was a 17% increase in the number of CBD assaults (Houston 2008). In the local government area of Melbourne, homicide rates increased by 150%, rape rose by 37.3%, assaults rose by 13.2% and drug possession increased by 17.8%.

In my own municipality of Moreland, there has been a 133% increase in homicide rates and 2.9% rise in assaults (Victoria Police 2009). Good Samaritan, Mr Luke Mitchell, was tragically killed in Brunswick in May, minutes after he intervened in violence outside the Spot nightclub in Sydney Road. He was stabbed five times and kicked as he lay wounded and defenceless on the street (Herald Sun 2009).

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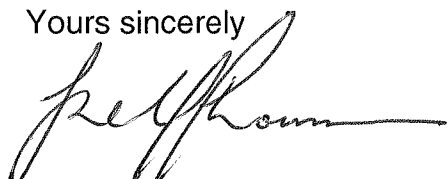
The Mayor of Melbourne, Cr Robert Doyle, recently pointed out that over the last 10 years late night licences were allowed to blossom across the city and we are now paying the price for it. Figures from the Melbourne City Council and the Liquor Licensing Commission are vastly different with regard to how many late night venues are in operation across the CBD. According to the Council there are 136 venues trading later than 1am and according to Liquor Licensing there are 302. This kind of proliferation has given us 2711 assaults per 100,000 people (Lahey 2009), and if we don't act then this figure will continue to rise.

I am pleased the Victorian Government announced earlier this year that an extra 25,000 yearly inspections will take place this financial year. Victoria's pubs and clubs were fined more than \$1 million last year for breaching laws such as serving drunks and allowing drunk and disorderly people to remain on the premises. There were 949 infringements issued against bar owners, with each infringement carrying a penalty of \$1361. The number of warnings issued to licensees rose from 51 in 2006 to 106 in 2008. Another 6887 offences were recorded at licensed premises last financial year for other issues, including 1578 assaults, 22 rapes, 130 drug offences and 63 weapons offences (Dowling 2009).

Victims of violence are right to say there should be fewer licences in Melbourne, and that large licence numbers are to blame for escalating violence on our streets. The Victorian Government has put a freeze on new licences but has resisted calls to scale back the 24,000 licences available in Victoria (Johnston 2009). A freeze on new late-night liquor licences in central Melbourne would also be helpful for neighbouring areas such as in my own electorate of Wills. Brunswick has seen a concerning rise in violent behaviour in recent times (Moreland Leader 2009).

Policy makers have an obligation to ensure that local communities are protected from drunk, disorderly and violent behaviour. Young people are regularly blamed in media reports for carrying out such activities. What is often overlooked, however, is the increasingly easy access to alcohol and late night venues that are a breeding ground for drugs, crime and anti-social behaviour. I encourage the committee to consider these concerns in the context of protecting young Australians from violent street thugs.

Yours sincerely



KELVIN THOMSON MP
Federal Member for Wills

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