

Madelyne Hammel

Committee Secretary
Community Support and Services Committee
Parliament House
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Sent via email: cssc@parliament.qld.gov.au

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Dear Committee Secretary,

I am writing to you regarding the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022 which was introduced into Queensland Parliament by the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services. I am concerned about the passing of this bill into legislation as I do not believe that there is a legitimate foundation for the extension of the current public health measures.

I believe that the current public health measures have provided limited benefits to Queensland residents, and that their extension beyond March would cause continued economic hardship and negatively impact on the mental and physical health of Queenslanders. I have included several points below which, I believe, require the Government to responsibly retract the proposed legislation and declare that Queensland is no longer in a state of emergency.

Emerging evidence of the destructiveness of the current public health measures

There is emerging empirical evidence in research studies which prove that the current public health measures have not conferred any benefits on society, in fact that may have been incredibly harmful. A systematic review and meta-analysis by Herby, Jonung, and Hanke showed that lockdowns (policies that limit internal movement, close schools, and businesses, and ban international travel) have little to no effect on Covid-19 mortality. However, lockdowns were found to impose enormous economic and social costs on members of the community.

Removal of public health measures in other nations

Several European nations have begun easing coronavirus measures after high vaccination rates and the emergence of the omicron variant. For example, Denmark removed all virus restrictions on the first of February due to the fact that coronavirus is “no longer a critical threat

to society". In Sweden, all restrictions lifted on the ninth of February and in Norway all Covid-19 measures were removed on February 17. Finland announced that they would be relaxing all Covid-19 restrictions beginning on February 14 and the restrictions would be fully lifted as of March 1. And there are numerous other countries that are scrapping their existing Covid-19 public health measures. It would appear inappropriate and cruel for Queensland to further extend their state of emergency and Covid-19 measures while other developed nations are moving forward towards normality.

Harmful flow on effects of current public health measures

To speak more personally, my husband and I have been negatively affected by the current public health measures. My husband is a chef and has worked in the hospitality industry for 13 years. He recently began a new job at a brand-new café in October, and the café enjoyed several busy weeks when they opened. However, the recent mandate for entry of vaccinated patrons only introduced in December devastated the business. After the introduction of the mandate my husband reported that foot traffic and income were reduced by 50 to 70 percent. As a result, the business is now running at a loss which is unsustainable and jeopardises the employment of all of the staff working at the café.

I began my Master's degree in Occupational Therapy in 2020. There have been numerous disruptions to my studies which I believe have negatively impacted on my readiness for placement and the workplace. I have completed two semesters online and most of my exams have been online and open book. There is a reduced demand for students in my course to learn and commit knowledge to memory, because the exam will be online, and students can use their notes. I have lost valuable placement hours due to Covid-19 lockdowns preventing me from accessing placement sites at Queensland Health and on campus. So, I have been unable to put my knowledge into practice which is one of the best ways to learn. Throughout my studies I have seriously questioned whether I will be a competent health professional. This is extremely concerning because I will be responsible for the health and recovery of patients and because completing study is extremely expensive and time consuming.

Recent High Court decision in New Zealand that vaccination mandates which impact on employability are illegal

The New Zealand High Court has recently ruled that the vaccine mandates for police and defence staff are unlawful. These mandates are identical to the mandates in Queensland which require aged care, border control, Queensland Health, and health professionals generally, teachers and other employees to be vaccinated to work. The Court determined that although vaccination could reduce the severity of symptoms it was significantly less effective at preventing the transmission of Covid-19 – which is currently endemic in New Zealand. Over the past few months Queenslanders have also observed that the vaccine has failed to prevent virus transmission.

Diminished severity and increased transmissibility of the virus coupled with limited effectiveness of the Covid-19 vaccine

██████████ the former deputy chief medical officer reported that the new dominant variant is less dangerous than the seasonal flu. In my lifetime there has never been a strain of seasonal flu which has prompted the government to create or extend a state of emergency. Which begs the question, why is the Queensland Government currently seeking to extend the state of emergency?

In fact, a large-scale study in Denmark found that there was no significant difference in transmissibility for Omicron and Delta in unvaccinated people. However, the Omicron variant

(which is now dominant in Queensland) was 2.6-3.7 times more infectious than the Delta variant among vaccinated people. This study suggests that vaccinated people are more likely to spread Omicron than unvaccinated people. So why is the Queensland Government demanding any member of the public be vaccinated to work in order to 'reduce the spread of Covid-19'?

Availability of other treatments to manage and treat individuals infected with Covid-19

For those who contract Covid-19 and require treatment there is now a range of treatments available including Budesonide, Casirivimab plus imdevimab (ronapreve), Sotrovimab, Dexamethasone, Remdesivir, Baricitinib, Tocilizumab, and Sarilumab. Some of these treatments have been available since July of 2020. And the TGA is currently evaluating several treatments including, Molnupiravir, PF-07321332, Tixagevimab and cilgavimab (Evusheld). This is very different to the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic when researchers and medical professionals had few treatments available to treat Covid-19 infection. I would argue that this was one of the reasons why the Queensland Government declared a state of emergency – a reason that is no longer valid.

Recent spread of Covid-19 throughout the community in Queensland

After the Queensland Government opened the border to domestic hotspots on December 13, Covid-19 infections increased drastically despite a 90 percent vaccination rate in Queensland. Speaking personally, most members of my community have contracted or know someone who has contracted Covid-19. I have not met a single individual who has experienced severe or debilitating illness.

The first case of Covid-19 in Australia was diagnosed on January 25 in 2020. It is currently March 4, 2022. Over two years have passed since the first case of coronavirus and Queenslanders have suffered a number of mandates or directives which have caused economic hardship and a decline in mental health. All of this was justified by the Queensland Government's claim that we were experiencing a state of emergency. I do not believe we are now experiencing a state of emergency and therefore the Queensland Government is unjustified in attempting to extend the current public health measures in place. Queenslanders are eager to put the Covid-19 pandemic behind them and return to normality with their jobs and lives. And so, I implore you to reject the current proposed legislation.

Yours Sincerely,

Madelyne Hammel