

3 March 2022

Committee Secretary  
Community Support and Services Committee  
Email: [cssc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:cssc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Committee Secretary,

**RE: PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (EXTENSION OF EXPIRING PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL 2022 (BILL)**

I would like to formally advise that I **do not** support the Bill nor the extension of the State of Emergency.

Queensland was the first state to declare a state of emergency (SOE) on 29 January 2020. An extension of the State of Emergency (SOE) laws from 30 April 2022 to 31 October 2022 will mean Queenslanders will have been under a SOE for nearly three years.

The time has come to accept that any perceived COVID-19 'emergency' is over. The current Omicron variant has by experience proven to not be a serious threat to the community and can be managed without the necessity for a declared SOE or extension of SOE. An article from the peer-reviewed New England Journal of Medicine titled 'Population Immunity and Covid-19 Severity with Omicron Variant in Africa'<sup>1</sup> dated the 23rd of February 2022 concluded a 'decoupling of hospitalisations and deaths from infections while omicron was circulating'. The Omicron variant has proven to be a flu-like variant that is easily treatable without the need for hospital admission. It is scientifically understood that that any future variant will most likely be of reduced severity. Jared Auclair, an associate teaching professor of chemistry and chemical biology at Northeastern concurs 'if the virus kills someone, if it kills the host, it dies with the host. So it totally defeats the purpose'. Because the goal of a virus is to survive, replicate, and spread, it tends to evolve toward being more infectious and less deadly. There are exceptions and other factors, but in general, says Auclair, that's what virologists expect to see occur with SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>

Across the world state of emergency restrictions have been lifted. Sweden has said the pandemic is essentially 'over' and scrapped all its few remaining restrictions. Health Minister Lena Hallengren stating "This pandemic, I would say it's over" whilst adding "It's not over, but as we know it in terms of quick changes and restrictions, it is." Denmark considers COVID-19 no longer "a socially critical disease".<sup>3</sup> Norway has lifted a swathe of restrictions. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced in mid-February 2022 that all regulations could be scrapped in England within a fortnight.

On Australian shores the CEO of the City of Gold Coast issued a letter to staff on 2 March 2022 advising that after considering an updated COVID-19 risk assessment the city will no longer pursue a mandatory vaccination policy. Sighting a 'changed pandemic situation' demonstrated by key changes including the Omicron wave has now past the peak for most of Queensland and the variant, being the dominate strain, results in flu-like symptoms where non-prescription pain killers and other first aid treatments are applied. This CEO has accepted that any perceived 'emergency' has passed and it is time to get on with the business of running the City of Gold Coast. It is not unreasonable for the Queensland Government to follow suit and to provide the same relief for all Queenslanders and for all businesses across the State of Queensland.

1. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2119658>

2. <https://news.northeastern.edu/2021/12/13/virus-evolution/>

3. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/the-countries-dropping-their-covid-19-restrictions-entirely-despite-the-omicron-surge/4o33omu3m>

The case for extending the SOE is over. The price on mental wellbeing due to being subjected to mandates issued under the temporary emergency powers extended by the Bill far outweighs any perceived threat of the Omicron variant or future variants. The effects of mandated face masks, lockdowns, home schooling and loss of jobs due to vaccine mandates has had serious consequences on the mental health of adults and children. The provisions taken under the current SOE have led to the disruption to mental health services for adults and children living with mental health problems, drug or alcohol use or within abusive environments. Mr Frkovic in the 22 January 2021 HEC Hearing – Inquiry into the Public Health and Other Legislation stated that ‘the restrictions imposed and the pandemic itself have had significant effects on the mental health and wellbeing of Queenslanders. It is important that we consider the implications of any possible unintended consequences...’.<sup>4</sup> He also advised that the ‘demand for mental health services had increased since March 2020’.<sup>4</sup> Mr Frkovic’s comments were made over a year ago in January 2021. It only stands to reason that the severity and prevalence of serious mental health issues would only be increased given the time and addition of further restrictions and mandates since January 2021.

One does not have to reference medical journals or public documentation to discover these consequences, one only has to speak to friends, family and community to realise that the price of these measures has been far reaching. Personally, I have met people who have lost teaching jobs or been put on suspension despite having vaccine exemptions from well respected specialist Doctors. This has cost them their purpose, confidence and livelihood. Unvaccinated who suffer with mental illness have been left to their own devices given that many physiological services have refused to treat the unvaccinated, even via telehealth. These may have been unintended consequences of a well-meaning Queensland Government however they are the real human costs. An extension of the SOE would only exacerbate the current mental health issues. The Queensland Government has the opportunity to alleviate and avoid further loss and suffering and reinstate the people’s trust in their government’s commitment to supporting all health matters by not extending the SOE and associated mandates.

The need for business restrictions imposed as part of the SOE provisions is finished. Mandates introduced under the SOE have devastated middle-class businesses. A flu-like illness does not necessitate the requirement of lockdowns, masking and the cost of materials and labour in enforcing the Check In Qld QR Code system. The Omicron variant has shown the tracing app no longer has relevance once a variant is virulent within society. Any maintaining of the QR Code system to track and trace the movement of Queenslanders will only seek to pique their interest as to any nefarious intent behind this system. Hence, the rise in public unrest and uprising of protests across the country against them. By choosing to not extend the SOE this government will be responsible for restoring faith in the current government for many of its hard-working business owning constituents.

Finally, with regard to mandates for vaccination, the science is in – there is no need to treat the unvaccinated as hosts moving amongst the community spreading a fatal disease. The Lancet published in November 2021 ‘Covid-19: stigmatising the unvaccinated is not justified’. This peer-reviewed medical journal reveals that ‘vaccinated individuals continue to have a relevant role in transmission’<sup>5</sup> with investigation ‘indicating a high viral load even among people who were fully vaccinated’.<sup>5</sup> In addition, it advises that ‘people who are vaccinated have a lower risk of severe disease but are still a relevant part of the pandemic. It is therefore wrong and dangerous to speak of a pandemic of the unvaccinated.’<sup>5</sup> This was written in the age of the Delta variant. With the advent of the flu-like Omicron variant with little to no treatment required, much less a need for hospitalisation, the government’s responsibility to protect the public via vaccination mandate is no longer scientifically rationalised and again another reason that an extension of the SOE is unjustified. Any attempt to maintain this particular mandate only serves to feed the suspicion of constituents as to why a government is so adamant to retain a public health direction under a SOE that is no longer necessary except to line the pockets of ‘elements’ with close ties to members of Government. A move any political adviser would not recommend for a government of the day wishing to see another term.

4. <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/committees/HEC/2020/PublicHealth2020/trns-22Jan2021-PH.pdf>

5. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)02243-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)02243-1/fulltext)

The time has come to exercise 362E of the Public Health and Other Legislation (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Bill 2020 - When public health directions must be revoked. It states 'the chief health officer must revoke a public health direction as soon as reasonably practicable after the chief health officer is satisfied the direction is no longer necessary to assist in containing, or to respond to, the spread of COVID-19 within the community.' 6 The honorable Yvette D'Ath (Redcliffe – ALP) Minister for Health and Ambulance Services admits in explanatory speech in speaking to this Bill amendment 'if and when I am satisfied that the temporary COVID-19 legislative powers are no longer necessary to prevent or minimise serious adverse effects on human health, I am required to end the declared public health emergency under the Public Health Act. Should this occur, all temporary COVID-19 measures will cease except transitional arrangements.' 7

In closing, to continue with the SOE is to tell all Queenslanders that even though the State is no longer in an emergency situation the State Government would not like to let go of its grip over personal freedom and choice. This is a slippery slope which if travelled would lead to further distrust and suspicion of the current Queensland Government. Whilst your original SOE may have been well intentioned and possibly has assisted with Queensland's low death rate due to COVID-19, the Queensland Government can no longer justify a COVID-19 driven SOE in Queensland.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this submission.

Regards,



Felicia Jackson

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