
From: Alexander Donald
Sent: Sunday, 17 May 2015 10:09 PM
To: Finance and Administration Committee
Subject: My submission on the Industrial Relations (Restoring Fairness) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

To: Members of the Finance and Administration Committee

I write to make a submission on the Industrial Relations (Restoring Fairness) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015.

I urge the committee to recommend passage of this bill without delay to ensure that the rights of public servants and local government workers are restored to them.

As both a [redacted] and a [redacted] for a broad range of [redacted] I have seen the terrible damage done to morale, to efficiency, and to quality and safety of services across public sector health services.

Under the LNP government there was a attack on doctors in the public sector that was sustained for three years. The attack on the employment, pay and conditions, integrity, professionalism, reputation and clinical services provided by doctors was damaging in the extreme.

A large proportion of specialists in Queensland submitted their resignation as part of a campaign against the appalling contract that the Newman government attempted to force them to sign. The specialists who filled out a resignation have already been through the heart-wrenching process of separating from clinical services to which they had dedicated their careers. The small extra step of quitting is no longer so difficult.

New specialists are overwhelmingly not prepared to commit to a full-time career in the Queensland Public Health sector - they have seen the contempt with which quality and dedication are rewarded. This means that non-clinicians are increasingly likely to be making critical decisions about clinical services in Queensland - without any requirement to consult with the clinical experts.

For those [redacted] who have remained in the public system there is the daily frustration of poorly considered (or possibly malicious) contract conditions that make no sense but cannot be easily changed. Illogical approaches to payment for on-call and Public Holidays cause irritation constantly, and have also caused huge workloads for administrators.

Many specialists have continued to provide services for Queenslanders on the assumption that a new Labor government meant a return to fair and reasonable employment conditions. Every week that fails to produce a return of industrial rights and protections increases the risk of specialists leaving - and reinforces Queensland's international reputation as an employer of absolute last resort.

Under current contracts and laws senior doctors are disempowered and under constant threat of management making arbitrary decisions in regard to services, duties, and performance indicators. Complaints about critical decisions such as implementation of Electronic Medical Records appear to go unheard, and even where a Specialist's contract provides a right to have a dispute heard external to the HHS there is no guarantee the doctor is able to enforce that right.

And let's not pretend that "local control" has any real meaning. Two specialists were suspended in Cairns following an article in the Courier Mail in October 2014 that the government didn't like. The same day a "Health Service Investigation" was announced that gave the then Director General absolute control of everything to do with the suspensions (which continued for 10 weeks), the investigation, the report, and any action against the specialists.

Doctors want certainty about processes, rights and entitlements. That requires immediate changes to the law to allow specialists once again to concentrate on medical services to Queenslanders instead of fighting for survival against the government and their management.

Finally, as well as the many specialists who retired, reduced hours or left Queensland, the current generation of junior doctors need some confidence in their future. Negotiations for the next Certified Agreement are due to start. Under current laws many of the most important conditions appear to be "non-allowable" under the unfair laws. In particular there can be no agreement on training, workloads, rosters or workforce planning - items critical to the next generation of specialists.

Queensland has suffered under laws that were often introduced late at night with no warning and no consultation. We can't afford to keep losing doctors while we wait for fair laws to be passed by the Queensland Parliament

Yours sincerely

Alexander Donald