




Speech By
Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

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HOSPITAL AND HEALTH BOARDS (SAFE NURSE-TO-PATIENT AND MIDWIFE-TO-PATIENT RATIOS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (8.30 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Hospital and Health Boards (Safe Nurse-to-Patient and Midwife-to-Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2015. This bill is a major election commitment of my government. At the outset, it gives me great pride to stand in this House tonight to implement an election commitment that we took to the people of Queensland and which the people of Queensland supported.

Before I go to the heart of what this bill is about, I want to thank a few people. I think it is important that we look at where we have come from, to learn the history to know where we have progressed from. First of all, I want to thank Beth Mohle for all of her hard work. Beth was a tireless champion of this cause. I worked with her over the three years that we were in opposition. At the outset, let me say that they were a tough three years. Those members who shared the opposition benches with me and who are now part of this government listened to the people of Queensland. We stood up for the people of Queensland. We said that there was a better way and we are delivering on that better way.

I spoke to a sole nurse out at Morven, who told me that taking away that crucial service in a small regional community would have a huge impact on the families who lived in that small town, that they would have to pack up and move because that nurse was not in that town. Tonight, I listened to Moira's story, who told us that she had been a nurse for 30 years and was sacked by the former Newman-Nicholls government. Now, she is back in employment—and aren't we lucky to have her back! Aren't we lucky!

I remember meeting with nurses in Townsville who could not understand why they lost their jobs. They were living in a community that they loved. They were raising a family they loved. Then one day out of nowhere, when everyone was told before the election of the Newman government that they had nothing to fear, 14,000 jobs were lost in this state—14,000 families, 14,000 people. Let us not forget that. These are people we are talking about: 1,800 nurses and midwives across the state. That had an absolutely devastating impact not only on them personally but also on their families and their communities. I heard these stories everywhere I went, whether it was to the Gold Coast, Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton or out west to Mount Isa. We travelled the length and breadth of the state listening to what people had to say—'How can you axe nurses?' 'How can you cut nurses out of our hospital system?' 'How can they possibly do it?' We worked with the nurses. We listened to them.

I want to pay tribute to Beth, Sally and all the other nurses. I pay tribute to the nurses, the midwives, our new nurse graduates and our trainees who are at the universities at the moment. I thank them for coming in tonight to show their support. It means a lot. This is the people's house. They are welcome here and I thank them very much for their presence here. It means a lot to every single member of the government.

I want to thank my staff, Angela MacDonagh and Greg Fowler, who worked very hard on this policy when we were in opposition. I want to thank Grace Grace, who was at the Nurses' Union and who worked with us. I also want to thank the member for Bundamba and all of my team in those opposition days who listened and put the evidence together.

I heard the member for Caloundra saying, 'There is no evidence.' This policy is evidence based. It is best practice and that is what we are implementing tonight. There is no better historic day on which to implement this legislation than International Nurses Day. I want to thank my health minister. Cameron has been driving the implementation of this policy. He has been working around the clock, because I said to him, 'This is our No. 1 priority in health'—to restore our front-line health services and to put in place nurse-to-patient ratios. Tonight, I want to pay tribute to all of the nurses and midwives in our state no matter where they work—in the public hospital system, in the private hospital system, in aged care, or visiting people who are living at home by themselves and who need support and care. I thank them very much for everything they do.

We know that there is nothing more important in this state than having a job. That is why we made a very firm commitment to implement 4,000 new nurse graduate positions. Why did we do that? Because I do not want young people or mature age people going through an educational institution and coming out at the end with no hope or no opportunity. I want them to have a job. I do not want them going to New South Wales or Victoria; I want them to have the opportunity to stay in Queensland and to give their professional care in Queensland. I am very proud that we are implementing this policy.

Recently, my grandmother had a stroke. It caught everyone off guard. We had celebrated her 91st birthday and three days later she had a stroke in the early hours of the morning. I remember going to the hospital and seeing the care and attention that she was given. My grandmother then went into rehabilitation and now she is in a nursing home. She lived in her own home until she was 91, all by herself. She was cooking, cleaning—doing everything. She was very active. The care that my grandmother received was outstanding. I cannot put into words the degree of care and attention she received. No-one else was more important in that hospital than my grandmother. But that is the way the nurses are with every patient. It does not matter where you come from, it does not matter what your background is, nursing is about putting people first. That is what a Labor government does. A Labor government supports our people throughout our state.

This is an historic day. Queensland becomes only the fourth jurisdiction to implement nurse-to-patient ratios in the world. Many people in this House will remember this moment for many years to come. In conclusion, once again, I thank everybody who has worked tirelessly on this bill. I also want to pay tribute to our public servants. A lot of time and effort has been spent in putting this bill together and doing the consultation. We on this side of the House value public servants.

I have made a commitment and I reiterate it tonight: my government will restore front-line services in this state. That is what the people of Queensland expect. It is a very humbling experience to be here. I thank the nurses and midwives very much for all of the work that they do right throughout our state. I will never forget their passion and commitment. I will not forget the tears that I shed with people who told me their personal stories or the stress that people went through when they lost their jobs. I was there with them. I walked with them. Today we restore their dignity and the dignity that puts patients front and centre. On behalf of the government, I thank nurses for everything that they do. God bless.