




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (8.19 pm): Tonight it is with great pride that I rise to speak in support of this bill. There are few moments in a political career where you can honestly feel very proud that you are making a real difference on an historic day. I cannot think of a better time than International Nurses Day to support this bill in relation to nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios because this bill acknowledges the crucial role that nurses and midwives play in delivering safe, high-quality health care for all Queenslanders.

There are currently no laws in Queensland governing how many patients can safely be allocated to a single nurse or a midwife. There is irrefutable evidence that staffing numbers, skill mix and the work environment directly affect the safety and quality performance of health services. There is no available evidence to suggest ratios do not improve patient safety. Subject to the passage of this bill, Queensland will join Victoria as the only other state in this great nation to take the important step of legislating nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios. This bill came about through significant efforts of the Queensland Nurses' Union and its members, and I will acknowledge them later in my speech because, without the efforts of nurses combining together and coming together in unison, this would not become law in this state. We are delivering on an election commitment of the Palaszczuk government to legislate for nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios in its first term of government and we are delivering on that promise.

I believe that nurses are some of the hardest working women and men that I have met. Before I was re-elected last year I had the proud honour of working for the Queensland Nurses' Union and I take this opportunity to say that they have been some of the best members that I have had the privilege to represent and work for. The staff and my colleagues and the council of the Nurses' Union are some of the hardest working, best unionists that I have met not only in Queensland but also in Australia and that is why it is often very hard to sit in this House and hear the union-bashing diatribe that comes from those opposite all too often.

Nurses work hard every day. They care for patients every day, but this legislation is about giving something back to the nurses. It is about recognising that, in order for them to do their job to the standard that they want to do their job, the business planning framework has not delivered exactly what nurses have needed to make the job that they do better each and every day. The legislated minimum nurse-to-patient ratio and midwife-to-patient ratio will be used in conjunction with the BPF and will provide the robustness required by nurses and midwives to plan for, meet and evaluate the outcome of this service. Ultimately, the combination of the BPF and ratios will allow those staff at the coalface to adjust the number of patients allocated to a nurse or midwife above the stipulated ratio in accordance with variables such as patient activity and acuity and other relevant factors so that the safeguards are there in order to deliver the best outcome for the hardworking nurses in our public hospitals throughout this great state.

We started this journey together and it is a very proud moment for me to be able to be in this House representing those wonderful members who are in the gallery and to represent those working in the hospitals out there tonight who cannot be here and speak in favour of this bill, and it will be a tremendous honour when the vote comes to vote in favour for ratios for every one of our hardworking nurses. I also like the fact that we will have an ability to evaluate this. We are going to have an independent evaluation process in relation to it and we have an exceptional team that will do that.

Let me make a couple of acknowledgements. There are few women in this world that you can respect any more than the Secretary of the Queensland Nurses' Union, Beth Mohle. She is an outstanding unionist, an absolutely remarkable nurse and an absolutely remarkable woman who knows her trade better than most people that I know, and I congratulate her on behalf of this parliament for the fantastic job that she does each and every day. She is ably aided by Sandra Eales, the assistant secretary. There are members of the council in the gallery, QNU staff and member nurses and midwives and I salute you all. Today I was asked questions about bargaining and our agreement and all of that, and I got up and said just how proud I was to have worked at the QNU. It was a moment in my life that I will never forget, just like the historic moment in this House tonight that I will also never forget.

This is long overdue. This is a small thing that we can do to say thank you to each and every one of you and those who are working hard in the hospitals right now. I do not have any relatives or sisters or aunts or uncles or mothers or fathers who are nurses. We just do not have them in our family for some reason, but what I do know is that if any one of us in this House gets sick and if any one of us needs help and if anyone needs to be nursed back to care we can rely on every single person in that gallery and every person who is out there working hard tonight.

I also congratulate the Premier, because it was her foresight and it was her understanding of this issue that brought this to fruition. She understood perfectly what nurses and midwives needed, and it was her brilliant and outstanding understanding of the issues that brought this to where it is. My good friend the Minister for Health has brought this into the House, and I congratulate him as well. I know that it is also a proud moment for my colleague the member for Greenslopes—a very proud nurse who spoke so eloquently tonight.

It is, as I said, time to give back. This side will always support nurses and midwives. This side will not sack nurses and midwives. This side will make sure that we have adequate nurses in our hospitals and that we will acknowledge the hard work that they do every single day. It is time to give back. I say that good old union chant: what do we want? Ratios! When do we want them? Now! It is a proud moment for us to vote for it. Ratios save lives. I commend the bill to the House.