




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (4.44 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. This bill seeks to build on the Palaszczuk government's ambitious health reform agenda in line with its election commitments. The bill aims to improve public health by providing consumers with more nutritional information about the food they eat. It includes mandatory labelling requirements so that consumers can make a better informed choice at food outlets. This is an important public health reform that will lead to better health outcomes.

I want to take this opportunity to put on record my support for the equalisation of the age of consent laws that form part of these broader legislative reforms. I want to thank those in the LGBTIQ community who have worked so hard to get this issue on the agenda and waited for so long for it to come before parliament. It is not a special privilege for those in the LGBTI community to be treated equally under the law; it is a right.

Ever since I was first elected to parliament and years before, the rights of LGBTIQ members, friends and colleagues have been of immense importance to me. I will always fight for those rights. I have spent most of my working life fighting against discrimination in all its forms and I will continue to do so until full equality is achieved. The law should not discriminate on the basis of sexuality full stop. Yet that is exactly what Queensland's existing unequal age of consent laws do. To be honest, I never understood it. I never really got it. I never could quite understand why we had a difference in the age of consent. It did not make any sense, it was unfair and I look forward to removing it today.

The equalisation of the age of consent is just another step in addressing the inequalities that have been a sad reality in Queensland for far too long. The proposed changes to Queensland's age of consent laws have been recommended by a panel of health experts and other relevant organisations. In May this year, this expert panel informed the health minister that the current laws may have adverse implications for young Queenslanders. I congratulate the health minister for taking on this issue, realising the health implications and doing what other governments have ignored for many years. I also congratulate all the members on this side of the House of the ALP caucus who unanimously agreed that this was something that we should do today.

One of the problems with the current laws is that young people in same-sex relationships sometimes feel compelled to withhold information about their sexual history from their health practitioner. This fear of the possible legal consequences, whether for themselves or their partner, has to stop. It is unfair and it makes no sense. Our laws should not be putting young people in the situation where access to appropriate medical treatment is adversely impacted. This is yet another reason we all need to support this bill.

I would like to acknowledge the work that the Queensland AIDS Council and the doctors from Holdsworth House, Stonewall Medical Centre, the Gladstone Road Medical Centre and other sexual health doctors who have advocated for this change for many years. I know that many of them are in the gallery. I acknowledge each and every one of them as well as members of Rainbow Labor, who I see in the gallery as well. I thank them all for coming to listen to this debate, because it is another historic day and another step forward that this government is making in order to achieve equality for the LGBTIQ community.

I also want to thank the expert panel for its findings, which have added crucial momentum to these proposed changes. It is Queensland's LGBTIQ community who will be the biggest beneficiaries as today we have the foresight and the willingness to make these laws a reality. This government is getting on with the business of delivering greater equality for the LGBTI community. We are making the decision to move forward and we are voting with our feet on issues to impose that equality. I urge the federal government to do exactly the same thing: get on with it as we are and introduce marriage equality into this country. Do not dillydally. We do not need a plebiscite. We know the issues. They are front and centre. It is about equality. It is about rights. It is about people from the LGBTI community having exactly the same rights that I have—no difference, no unfairness, exactly the same. Get on with it. What I say is bring on the legislation. Vote in favour and bring marriage equality into this country.

There are many activists in the gallery who have fought for decades for equality with respect to the age of consent. I am proud to be a long-time supporter of this proposed reform, and I know many Queenslanders share in my pleasure to see that the LGBTIQ community's years of hard work may soon finally pay off. I commend everyone involved in bringing this before the House, particularly the Minister for Health, who has done an excellent job, and my Labor caucus once again. I thank those in the gallery for their support. It gives me great pleasure to vote in favour of this bill. I commend the bill to the House.