




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR LYTTON

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**FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (DOMESTIC SMOKE ALARMS)
AMENDMENT BILL; FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (SMOKE ALARMS)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms PEASE** (Lytton—ALP) (8.34 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016. I would like to begin by thanking the chair of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, the member for Ferny Grove, Mark Furner, and also the other committee members and the secretariat. I would also like to thank the many submitters and those who provided evidence at hearings, sharing their knowledge, expertise and often difficult and distressing experiences. It was very much appreciated.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to improving the safety of all Queenslanders by rolling out the most comprehensive smoke alarm legislation for homes in Australia. The government's bill will save lives and, most importantly, the lives of children and vulnerable people. It will improve safety outcomes for the community and those most vulnerable to deaths from house fires.

Following the inquest into the tragic Slacks Creek house fire, the coroner's key recommendation was to ensure that photoelectric smoke alarms are audible in the bedroom at a minimum sound level of 75 decibels. The only practical way of achieving that sound level at the bedhead is to place alarms in all bedrooms. That is what the government's bill seeks to achieve. It will provide residents with an early warning of the presence of a fire at a sound level capable of waking occupants in all places where people sleep and also implement a long-held recommendation of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.

However, without interconnected alarms in bedrooms, if an alarm in the hallway activates and the bedroom door is closed, the sound level at the bedhead could be as low as 36 decibels. That may not provide an alarm at a level that is necessary to awaken residents. Installing smoke alarms in every bedroom and, importantly, interconnecting them with other alarms in the house will mean that, if an alarm—say, for example, downstairs in the lounge—detects smoke, all the alarms will sound an alert. This is particularly critical for children and vulnerable or elderly people who, unfortunately, are overrepresented in house fire deaths.

A major cause of death from domestic fires is smoke inhalation. A sleeping person may become unconscious from inhaling smoke and potentially die without ever being aware of the presence of a fire. A study by the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council found that most fires occur during the sleeping hours of between 8 pm and 8 am, with a peak time between midnight and 4 am. A University of Victoria study of house fires found that 50 per cent of house fire related deaths can be reduced through interconnected smoke alarms that are installed in all bedrooms. If smoke alarms are not interconnected, and in all bedrooms, parents and elderly people would not be alerted to fires that, for example, may start in the children's bedrooms or elsewhere in the house until it is too late as smoke inhalation is a silent killer.

Sadly, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services advise that the elderly and children are statistically more likely to die in house fires as they are less likely to be roused from sleep. The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council study found that the very old and the very young are four times more likely to die in a house fire than are the rest of the community. Interconnecting the alarms will notify residents of the presence of a fire at a sound level sufficient to wake them, even if the fire is in another part of the house. The private member's bill does not require smoke alarms in bedrooms, which is also against the recommendations of the coroner.

The other great advantage of the government's smoke alarm bill for children and vulnerable people is that it provides the earliest possible warning of the presence of a fire. In the case of a fire, the elderly and other persons suffering from mobility impairment may take longer than others to exit their homes. That is particularly true when personal security has been prioritised ahead of fire safety, making it difficult to exit a home.

As such, the rapid alert that a photoelectric alarm in a bedroom provides while smoke is only at ceiling level equips vulnerable people with the best possible chance of escaping a fire unharmed. It also provides caregivers with the maximum time to assist others in exiting the building if needed. Further, I can advise that vulnerable persons who may feel unsure about how to comply with the new provisions can arrange a home visit from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services through its Safehome program. The government is also currently working on an assistance package to ease the cost of compliance for households, as the member for Coomera spoke about earlier, so there is some support and assistance for people who might be struggling with meeting those demands. Queensland Fire and Emergency Services has also committed to providing an education campaign to advise the community on the changes and how they need to comply. This campaign will have a particular focus on vulnerable persons and those most in need of assistance.

Quite simply, the government's bill will save lives. It will save children's lives, it will save vulnerable people's lives, it will save Queenslanders' lives. I am very proud to be part of a government that is taking concrete steps to improve the safety of all Queenslanders. I commend the Fire and Emergency Services (Domestic Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2016 to the House.