




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (4.38 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, which seeks to amend the Criminal Code and standardise the age of consent. Let us be very clear about this amendment bill. It is not controversial, it is not drastic; it is something that is well overdue. We are righting a wrong and removing legislation that has discriminated against LGBTI community members for far too long. I want to acknowledge and thank the members of our LGBTI community who are with us today in the public gallery, particularly those members of Rainbow Labor and my good friend Sean Leader. As the health minister has said, Queensland is the only Australian jurisdiction where the age of consent for anal sex is different to the age of consent for all other sexual activity. There is no logical reason for this disparity, particularly when it comes to the health and protection of young Queenslanders.

Sexual health experts tell us that varying ages of consent, dependent on sexual activity, is a barrier for young people who are seeking assistance and education. Amending the Criminal Code is essential if we want young Queenslanders to feel comfortable seeking advice from sexual health providers, because it removes the fear of retribution. I know that the health minister, through his consultation on this bill, has heard that feedback from sexual health providers many times over. The last thing we want is young Queenslanders feeling too intimidated to visit a sexual health provider.

This amendment has been supported widely across the health and education sectors, including the Public Health Association of Australia, the Queensland Family and Child Commission and the Queensland AIDS Council. Not only do those organisations support the change; they advocate for ongoing investment into sexual health education; and safe, accessible and quality health care, including sexuality health care—and it is the right of every citizen in this state and this country to have access to that care. The Palaszczuk government is committed to removing barriers for any community members accessing the services and support they need.

On the day that legislation to amend the age of consent is passed, we should also reflect on the impact that this legislation will have on women and women's health. Our women's health strategy means that we are investing \$4.4 million for 12 women's health services around the state. We are investing \$15.8 million over three years to fund the North Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexually Transmissible Infections Action Plan 2016-2021 to strengthen health systems and reduce STI rates that present particular risks for women. Our commitment to women's health will ensure that women, especially young women, have access to the help and support they need to have safe sex.

The current difference between the age of consent has had a particular impact on the LGBTI community—a community that has historically suffered at the hands of the Queensland government, which has had to endure inequality embedded in our laws. After decades of Nationals rule, it was only under the Goss Labor government in the early 1990s that homosexuality was decriminalised in Queensland. Now, in 2016, we are righting the wrongs of past governments against our LGBTI community.

In just 18 months, the Palaszczuk government has reinstated civil unions after they were shamefully taken away by the Newman government. We are taking action to expunge historical convictions of homosexuality for gay Queenslanders. Just yesterday, I was so proud to introduce legislation that will finally allow same-sex couples to adopt—one of the last barriers of discrimination against LGBTI Queenslanders in our statute books. We are slowly dismantling legislation that continues to discriminate against the LGBTI community, but we know that inequality still exists at both the state and federal level.

We only have to look at the LNP's costly and divisive marriage equality plebiscite, which we found out this week will give \$7.5 million to groups such as the Australian Christian Lobby, to run damaging campaigns in our community. In an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, family psychologists Dr Liz Short and Dr Sharon Dane warned that the no campaign would be incredibly damaging for young LGBTI people, who already experience higher levels of aggression and prejudice and are more prone to depression and suicide. It is shameful that this divisive campaign, which could potentially cost lives, is supported by the LNP at the federal level.

We on this side of the House can help deliver equality to the LGBTI community by simply doing our job and, by passing the right legislation with this bill, we will. We are amending legislation because we know, like marriage equality, equality in the law is the right thing to do. I am proud that this bill will remove discrimination against the LGBTI community.

I want to finish by informing the House that, on 14 June this year, along with many of my colleagues I attended Brisbane's vigil for the Orlando massacre. This tragic event was a direct attack on LGBTI people and a deeply sad day for the international LGBTI community. During the vigil, which was cloaked in sadness, optimism and hope shone through. Even through this devastating event, the speakers at the vigil still reminded each other that better days will come. One of the speakers at that vigil used the age of consent laws, which were introduced the same week as the vigil was held, as proof that, although there have been setbacks, change was coming. This bill might seem small to many people, but it is part of a bigger and longer march for equality. When this bill passes, we will take another step forward. I commend the bill to the House.