




Speech By
Jennifer Howard

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (5.51 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Termination of Pregnancy Bill. The bill presents an historic opportunity for Queensland to decriminalise termination of pregnancy and to place it into the Health Act where it belongs. The Palaszczuk Labor government took this reform to the 2017 state election and is committed to delivering this to Queensland women. I thank the Attorney-General, the Premier and the health minister for the work they have done preparing this bill and I wish to acknowledge the work done by the Queensland Law Reform Commission for its excellent review and investigation into the reform of termination laws in Queensland. I also acknowledge the excellent work done by the parliamentary committee on this bill.

I want to acknowledge all of my constituents who contacted me about this legislation before us this evening. As we have already heard, it is an issue that many people are passionate about. I also want to acknowledge my electorate officers, Susan and Keryl, who have been at the coalface of these opinions. I know they have both been exposed to things that have disturbed them deeply and I thank them for their professionalism throughout this process.

There are so many things to say about the issue of decriminalisation of abortion, but at the same time there is very little. The laws we are seeking to change are archaic and have no place in modern society. This legislation has not been rushed through or poorly thought out as claimed by the member for Mudgeeraba. There have been two parliamentary inquiries and the QLRC deliberated over this for more than 12 months. The QLRC's 28 recommendations have been accepted in full by the Palaszczuk government and it informs this milestone legislation.

To begin with I acknowledge that this debate has been challenging and difficult. It is a debate that has been emotionally wrenching for many women and men and one that goes to the heart of people's core values and beliefs. Conversations about issues such as termination of pregnancy are especially difficult in times when our general public debate has become particularly divisive and polarised. However, it is a conversation that we need to have. Unfortunately, some of that conversation has been laden with misinformation, falsehoods and alarming language that has had the intent to emotionally manipulate for the purpose of stirring guilt, shame and fear. For many women who have needed access to termination services in Queensland, this legislation is a long time coming.

In saying that, I would like to acknowledge some of the pioneers and campaigners of this debate who are in the House and have been listening with great interest. It means so much to me to see them here and to know that I am a member of a government led by a Premier, a Deputy Premier and a first-class front bench that has had the courage to finally right this historic wrong against women. You women are warriors and have invested much of your time and energy and passion to this issue and I know you are all awaiting the outcome of this debate with bated breath.

Our current laws have created uncertainty, fear and stigma for women and health practitioners. For women in regional and rural areas who do not have access to termination services, it presents serious health issues. Some women have been turned away for trying to access terminations and told

that the procedure is illegal. They have experienced deliberate delay by medical practitioners who have conscientiously objected to carrying out the service and they have been shamed into carrying out their pregnancies to full term by pro-life doctors.

We have been afforded a conscience vote on the Termination of Pregnancy Bill and I am grateful to use it for supporting this bill. I firmly believe that abortion is a personal health matter for women and their GP and it should not belong in the Criminal Code. The conscience vote is core to our democratic government and although rare in Queensland it has been used to determine legislation of significant moral and social importance such as we have seen in the past 15 years with the Prohibition of Human Cloning Bill in 2003, the Surrogacy Bill in 2009 and the Civil Partnerships Bill in 2011 and again in 2015.

My decision to support the Termination of Pregnancy Bill is not just based on my belief that abortion should be treated as a personal health matter. My support is based on the Queensland Law Reform Commission's review. I believe they have done a tremendous job in objectively examining this reform and their recommendations are in line with contemporary clinical practice and consistent with similar legislation in other Australian jurisdictions. During the review, the QLRC consulted widely with informed healthcare organisations and stakeholders and this bill reflects the positions held by those stakeholders and organisations, including the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

As Minister Miles said today, voting against this bill will not stop terminations and I personally do not see how voting for this bill will result in more terminations being performed. On the contrary, since Victoria decriminalised termination of pregnancy in 2008 it has seen a significant decrease in rates of abortion. This decrease has also been reported in other jurisdictions across the world that have decriminalised terminations.

Voting for this bill will ensure that Queensland women will have access to safe reproductive services without having to face legal uncertainty or feelings of shame and anxiety. Whether a termination is carried out for medical or personal reasons, the decision to terminate a pregnancy is a heartwrenching one for women and their loved ones. It is not a decision made flippantly for so-called social reasons. There are always good reasons a woman needs access to termination services and those reasons are personal, health related and are a matter between herself and a qualified health practitioner. To suggest otherwise is insulting. I am proud to support this bill and I commend it to the House.