




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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PERSONALISED TRANSPORT OMBUDSMAN BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (4.33 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Personalised Transport Ombudsman Bill, which we are debating here at this regional sitting in Townsville. It is a delight to be here in Townsville with the people of Townsville who have had more than their fair share of natural disasters this year. Just before turning to the details of the bill, I would like to thank the parliamentary staff and also the security staff who are here at this regional sitting. I would like to thank the members of the parliamentary Transport and Public Works Committee who reviewed this legislation. Given that I know we are facing the guillotine fairly soon, I will move to some of the main concerns that I have in relation to this legislation.

Basically, this legislation sets up an ombudsman that is really in name only. As we have heard earlier, it will be a 'toothless tiger'. The term 'ombudsman' usually refers to an independent body that can investigate complaints made about government. Historically, an ombudsman represents the interests of the public by addressing the complaints of maladministration or violation of rights.

As outlined in the explanatory notes, the main policy objective of the bill is to establish what we will refer to as the PTO in order to help resolve complaints from anyone relating to personalised transport services—I repeat: anyone in relation to personalised transport. That is not just government; that is a very broad cross-section of people. The PTO can also identify and report to the minister on systemic issues arising from personalised transport complaints. I think there are a couple of important words here—'identify' and 'report'. There is something that is really missing. What happened to the solutions to those systemic complaints? I think the general public want to see solutions and they want to see a better outcome. They do not want to see just another report and identification of the problem. It sounds to me like the Labor government does not really know what it wants, so for convenience sake it is calling it an ombudsman.

I have read the explanatory notes and also the bill, and there is no reference in either the explanatory notes or the bill about the qualifications for this position. There is a list of disqualifications but not a list of what the qualifications should be. You would think that an ombudsman in this area would have to have prior experience in the personalised transport industry. We do not know whether this ombudsman will have any prior experience because it is not specified in the explanatory notes or the bill. You would expect that an ombudsman would have some sort of legal background or some qualifications. We are not told that either. We do not know whether this ombudsman will have any formal qualifications. Basically, this position is going to be set up, and it could be a job for the boys or a job for the girls. Unless there is some reference to prior experience or qualifications in the explanatory notes or the bill, this ombudsman will just become another job for a union mate.

I have outlined those concerns. Regrettably, this bill that has been brought forward by the Labor government is not meeting the needs of the industry or consumers. If we look at the stakeholder feedback, the Taxi Council wrote to the government to say that the Personalised Transport Ombudsman represents a 'toothless tiger' and that the idea is a waste of money. It is very disappointing that we would be wasting money because money is short. Taxpayers' money is something we should have

careful regard for. Even more concerning is that they expressed the view that the substantive and pressing issues confronting their sector appear to be outside the purview of the proposed role. That is really disappointing.

The Ride Share Drivers' Association indicated that the whole of the legislation is flawed because the ombudsman will have no real powers to compel parties to be bound by any results. It would appear that the industry believes that the bill has a lot of shortcomings. Regrettably, when submissions about this legislation start with warnings that it will be a waste of taxpayers' funds and that it will not be delivering improved outcomes to consumers, what we have here is a bad bill that unfortunately is going to become bad law.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Whiting): Under the provisions of the business program agreed to by the House and the time limit for this stage of the bill having expired, I call the minister to reply to the second reading debate.