




Speech By
Kim Richards

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

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HEALTH TRANSPARENCY BILL

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (6.44 pm): I rise in this House to speak in support of the Health Transparency Bill. We know how important this bill is to Queensland families, our older Queenslanders and the future of providing good quality care for the ones we love. My mum is 73. When you are propositioned with the thought that you might have to put a loved one into aged care, it is a really tough decision. I have friends who have had to go through that process of trying to find a place for their family member and worry that they are going to get the care that they need. As we have seen writ quite large this year, that is sometimes not the case.

I have been privileged to visit a number of aged-care facilities in the Redlands electorate. I was just at Marebello for its Remembrance Day service. The staff there are just an absolute delight. They are possibly under the pump, but they are an absolute delight and provide the best quality care with the resources and the time they are allotted. As I said, we have seen some of the most appalling treatment and really poor care of our elderly and frail in aged-care homes play out before our eyes—treatment I know I would never want anyone in my community to experience, treatment that I would never want anyone I loved to experience, treatment that is just unacceptable.

We saw this treatment play out at Earle Haven in the middle of the night. I know that the member for Gaven and Minister Miles were very quick to react, help get that situation under control and find places for those poor elderly and frail people in the middle of the night. It is just unfathomable that that situation could ever have occurred. We have since learned that there was a lot more detail known and that a number of red flags at Earle Haven should have been picked up well before that point in time in the middle of the night.

The royal commission into aged care, the Moreton Bay aged care centre at Wynnum that the member for Lytton pointed out and, again, Earle Haven have shone a light on how badly our federal government has dropped the ball on regulating aged care. Some private operators are simply putting profits before people. We have heard through the committee process that some residents are being fed on \$6 a day. I do not think one person in this chamber could be fed on \$6 a day. I would love to see a show of hands. Some private facilities have staffing levels that fall dangerously low. As Minister Miles noted in his introductory speech to this bill, it is disturbing that the federal government opposed this bill and wrote a lengthy and detailed submission opposing it. Again, it is unfathomable that anybody would oppose providing better care. More people means more care. That is what providing desirable staff ratios will deliver.

We on this side of the House know that we have to care for our elderly. We know that we are all going to be elderly one day. The framework that this bill puts in place will help the provision of aged care in the future. Aged care is a growing trend. As we continue to live longer and have an increasing aged population, we really have to think about this issue.

The Palaszczuk government is focused on ensuring that we provide the best level of care to Queenslanders, particularly in the facilities that we control. The Redlands electorate has one of Queensland's largest ageing communities. My electorate has many different types of aged-care

facilities, both public and private. It was wonderful to have the members for Thuringowa, Rockhampton and Lytton from the health committee join me on a visit to the Redlands aged-care facility that is co-located near Redland Hospital. It was wonderful to speak with the staff there who are already operating at staffing levels that are appropriate. That was made very clear in the conversations that I had with some of the patients there on that day as well as from talking with the staff. It was wonderful to see that that facility is already doing what it should be doing. In our meeting with the staff they all agreed that this legislation would reinforce what was already happening for them on the ground and that it was something that should be happening on the ground in every single aged-care facility in the state of Queensland.

This bill deals with three main issues. The most significant of those issues is to establish a legislative framework for obtaining and publishing comparative information about public and private health facilities and residential aged-care facilities. The bill makes it a requirement for public residential aged-care facilities to maintain a minimum nurse and support worker skill mix ratio and a minimum number of hours of care per resident each day. This bill seeks to mandate the minimum care hours per resident. It will encourage private facilities to report their care hours to the public.

This bill is about making sure that our parents, our grandparents, the ones we love and members of our community are treated with respect, with dignity, and are provided with the appropriate level of care. I do not think there is a person in this House who would want to go into a place that did not offer those basic fundamentals.

It is mindboggling that the federal government has opposed this for so long. Shonky contractors and greedy owners have been let off the hook so that they can continue to exploit elderly and vulnerable people. It has continued to let dodgy contractors and greedy owners exploit vulnerable Queenslanders for profit. It is absurd to claim that this legislation will create some sort of regulatory burden. It is crazy. Every operator should know how many staff they have. I am sure they run a weekly, fortnightly or monthly payroll. They will know what their staffing levels look like. This is not an onerous burden. It is pretty darn simple, in fact. They should just be made to provide that information.

We know there are some private facilities operating where one nurse can be covering 50 patients. This split shift nonsense, where one nurse might be operating between two different facilities that are 10 minutes apart, is crazy. I do not think anyone would want this level of care for their family members. Nurse-to-patient ratios are used in hospitals, educator-to-child ratios are used in childcare facilities and teacher-to-student ratios are used in our schools. All these important sectors have improved reporting and openness. It is on the record. The research shows that when you are transparent about what you do you are obviously providing a very good service. It is time we applied this same logic to the elderly, who are equally deserving of our respect and of our care.

A properly federally funded and staffed aged-care system will relieve pressure on our public hospital system as well. I had the privilege of visiting Redland Hospital, meeting with our nurse navigators and the people who work in the emergency department and understanding what drives that emergency department. There are a lot of presentations from our aged-care facilities in our emergency departments. Better staffing will improve outcomes within our public hospital system. We are blessed in Queensland to have a world-class healthcare system. We know that transparent information about health care leads to better patient outcomes, increased safety and higher quality care.

This bill also makes changes to the Health Ombudsman Act that will continue to improve how complaints are dealt with and the performance of our Health Ombudsman's functions. Our government is committed to delivering better health outcomes for all Queenslanders and increased safety and higher quality care in private and public hospitals, health facilities and aged care. We know that access to transparent information is an integral part of that commitment. This bill will give comfort and certainty to our families—our sons, our daughters, those who have to make that really tough decision about putting their loved one into an aged-care facility—that their loved one is going to get the best quality care. It is something every son, daughter, family member or friend deserves to be assured of.

Our seniors have been the hardworking Queenslanders who built this state. They deserve to be looked after. They deserve a better aged-care system than we are delivering. It is incumbent upon us to make sure that we set the frameworks that provide better care for the increasing number of people in Queensland who will continue to age. I commend this bill to the House.