




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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HEALTH TRANSPARENCY BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (4.20 pm): In speaking to the Health Transparency Bill 2019, I want to raise some of the issues that emerged from the committee's review, including the lack of evidence to determine the level at which minimum care levels are set and the cost of the new requirement—I believe \$10 million annually—that will come from existing health resources. It has taken two years to get to this point. It was an election commitment. It will take another two years to phase in this legislation. With all the talk from those opposite about how urgent this bill is, we question their priorities.

Queenslanders want to see world-class aged-care facilities. No-one in this place would argue against that. Queenslanders who have worked hard all their lives deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. We support the federal aged care royal commission. We need all levels of government to work together on this issue, particularly in the interests of elderly Queenslanders. We want to try to keep politics out of it, but I do not think we in this place have it in us.

The bill amends the Hospital and Health Boards Act. The draft amendment regulation also amends the Hospital and Health Boards Regulation. As the bill has a significant long title relating to transparency, I intend to discuss issues about the Wide Bay health service, particularly as the bill references the chief executive and their powers.

The bill states that the chief executive will be empowered to collect and publish, among other things, general information about public and private health facilities, quality and safety information about public and private health facilities, and residential care information. The bill will empower the chief executive to request general information and safety and quality information from those facilities. The chief executive may also request quality and safety information prescribed in the regulation.

We want to make sure that people throughout Queensland have a world-class public health system. In my part of the world, the Wide Bay health district, people are suffering. I have spoken before in this place about some data, the challenges of data, and the facts. Unfortunately, for the Wide Bay area, that data refers to ambulance ramping and surgery wait times. Over the past two months a terrible culture as returned to the Wide Bay health service.

In relation to this Health Transparency Bill, I want to talk about the transparency in relation to, of all things, the laying off of the chief executive, Mr Adrian Pennington. I have previously called on the minister to show leadership. I understand that there are some legal issues involved but, after two months, I would really love the minister to come to the Bundaberg region to talk to key providers and stakeholders about what is going on.

This issue is about patients. I want to make sure that today I give the people of Hervey Bay and Bundaberg a voice. They are entitled, under public transparency, to answers about the standing down of the chief executive of the Wide Bay health service. It is a sorry saga. It has continued for two months and there has been no explanation. Questions remain unanswered.

We created the hospital and health services to give our communities opportunities to engage with the health system and we must make sure that political interference is kept out of that. My community deserves answers from the board chair and particularly the minister. As we are debating health transparency, in my contribution I will again ask questions of the board chair and the minister.

As nearly two months have passed since Mr Adrian Pennington was put on special leave with an email on 30 September to 4,000 staff—

Mr POWER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. This is well outside the long title. I ask you to bring the member back to the long title of the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Weir): As I stated when I was in this chair yesterday, this is a very broad-ranging bill. It talks about public and private health facilities and the complaints framework. I have allowed the same leniency for both sides.

Mr POWER: It does not talk about the employment options of the CEO of the Wide Bay health service. That is clearly outside the long title of the bill.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have made my ruling. If you do not like my ruling, you can write to the Speaker.

Mr BENNETT: In acknowledging the interjection by the member for Logan, I have tried to keep my contribution within the long title of the bill. The Health Transparency Bill allows questions about transparency. I hope I can be given some latitude to continue to make my contribution.

What entitlements have been paid to Mr Pennington after two months? After seven years of excellent service, why was this chief executive marched out of the hospital and treated so poorly? What are the reasons for his dismissal? After two months, those reasons must be provided. Will the minister call for a review of the events leading up to Mr Pennington's crisis event and the Facebook post that I have spoken about before in this place? Under a transparency banner, can the minister confirm that there was not a personal vendetta and that the complaints used to terminate the chief executive were thoroughly investigated independently of the board chair?

Government members interjected.

Mr BENNETT: I take the interjections from those opposite. This is a broad-ranging bill. It is about transparency. I have listened to the speeches of those opposite. It is really wonderful that the members are listening.

More importantly, under the transparency banner I want to know what mental health support has been provided to Mr Pennington since he was escorted from the Bundaberg Hospital two months ago. Sources have indicated that, contrary to the statements of the board chair in the media that Mr Pennington has been offered support, that has not happened. In an organisation that should be about the health and wellbeing of staff, I cannot believe that we have a board chair of the Wide Bay health service talking about an employee's mental health, particularly in the media.

I reiterate that the way this issue has been handled was designed to cause maximum damage and destroy the credibility and future prospects of, I would argue, not only this health executive but others. We need a full external investigation of the chair's actions in the so-called sacking of this chief executive. As predicted, the situation has become a lot worse. The Wide Bay health service will lose staff as they will not tolerate working under this board chair.

In conclusion, I know now that the performance of this high-performing HHS has started to slide. I think it is only prudent, in debating this Health Transparency Bill, that I call on the government to be transparent about this process. My community deserves better. I would have thought that, in relation to a modern facility that is concerned about patient care, we show respect to my community and get to the bottom of what has turned into a very sorry state of affairs.