




Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**

**MEMBER FOR BANCROFT**

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Record of Proceedings, 21 May 2020

**JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION (COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE)  
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (5.47 pm): I rise to speak in support of the bill. I point out to the member for Maroochydore that you can talk about the reduction of red tape but you have to acknowledge the work that the Palaszczuk government has done in supporting small businesses in this state—mum-and-dad businesses—through the packages this government has delivered.

I will just point out some of the things we have delivered: six-month relief for government building tenants; land tax relief for commercial property owners, which must be passed on to tenants in the form of rent relief; and \$950 million in payroll tax refunds, waivers and deferrals for business, meaning most businesses will not pay payroll tax in 2020. Let us not forget the \$500 energy rebates to small and medium businesses, and let us not forget the \$1 billion in loans for small businesses during this COVID crisis, including \$500 million from CIQ. No other state or territory in Australia has offered this assistance. Let us not forget the waiving of liquor licensing fees for businesses, and let us not forget the 15 free online resilience TAFE courses available through the Jobs Finder portal.

**Dr Lynham** interjected.

**Mr WHITING:** I will take the member's interjection: 'What have the Romans ever done for us?' The list of what we have done for businesses affected by COVID-19 is amazing, and it has been acknowledged by business. This bill continues on with that support.

As the Premier said on Tuesday, it is incredible what Queenslanders have achieved in just 11 weeks. This response will be studied by historians for years to come. As the Premier said when we last sat on 22 April, 1,024 cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in the three months since the first case. Today, almost one month later, the Queensland case total is 1,058. Just a month ago, 280 cases of COVID-19 were still active. Today that case number is 12. I pay tribute to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services. He should be extremely proud of what he has done, and we should be extremely proud of what Queenslanders have done, but we need to do more and this bill sets out what needs to be done.

As I said, Queenslanders can be proud of what they have done and they can be proud of what their government has done as well. The response so far from this government has been a commitment of over \$6 billion, and that includes \$1.2 billion in the health response. One thing that people have been very positive about is the \$200 off their utility bills as a cost-of-living relief measure. That has been hugely popular. Let us not forget that we reacted early by changing the Public Health Act 2005 to give the Chief Health Officer and emergency officers more powers to contain this outbreak. I have mentioned this in here before. We acted quickly to get an additional 110 ventilators and \$25 million worth of medicine, gloves and masks. We tripled emergency department capacity and doubled intensive care facilities. We set up fever clinics. We are in a much better position to enact this bill and to keep enacting these protections because we have employed thousands of extra staff in Queensland Health since 2015.

The bill deals with the issue of commercial rents. The reforms that we are delivering are incredibly important to mum-and-dad businesses across our communities. North Lakes in my electorate is home to many big box chain stores and big department stores, but an amazing number of businesses are what I have described as mum-and-dad businesses, like Picture Framing on Discovery, which gives great personal service, and Semi-Pro Coffee, which supplies excellent coffee to coffee shops like Basecamp near Costco and Bunnings.

We have seen some problems with commercial rents for these sorts of businesses, with people trying to negotiate and improve commercial rents during this time. One shop I talked to supplies equipment to local performing arts students throughout the region. Its business has dropped by something like 95 per cent because there is no performing, eisteddfods or anything like that. I was in touch with the landlord and the tenant and I encouraged them to negotiate in good faith. They did get that outcome and a rent holiday for a few months.

**Mr Bleijie:** Stop filibustering. Give someone else a chance.

**Mr WHITING:** I would actually recommend that the member for Kawana listen to this.

**Mr Bleijie:** I never listen to you.

**Mr WHITING:** I know you do not listen, but this is how you actually work with businesses.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Dr Robinson): Order! Member for Kawana and member for Bancroft, please speak through the chair.

**Mr WHITING:** The member for Kawana might like to read the national code of conduct for commercial leases. This is an important part of what we have delivered at a national and a state level to improve how people can actually negotiate those commercial rents. This bill is an important part of delivering that reform and those protections for those mum-and-dad businesses across places like North Lakes.

One of the most important amendments I want to address is the temporary power to modify or suspend the process for increasing site rents in home parks. I feel very passionate about this and I actually believe this is one of the greatest things we have achieved in our term—that surety to those thousands of residents in home parks across South-East Queensland and all of Queensland. This is one of the biggest issues for thousands of people in my electorate and they need to be able to deal with it. We have already provided great reforms since 2015. We have made sure there are no two rent increases in a year. We have set out how the rent rise can be negotiated and how to take on the home park owner if there is a problem. They do not need to be dragged through QCAT anymore. We have achieved incredible reforms. What we are delivering with this will be another very welcome reform in this area and it is certainly a crucial part of negotiating our response for the COVID-19 emergency. I commend the bill to the House.