




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

Record of Proceedings, 8 September 2020

**CRIMINAL CODE AND OTHER LEGISLATION (WAGE THEFT) AMENDMENT
BILL**

Second Reading

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations)
(5.26 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

Last week I met with a group of hospitality workers who have personal experience of wage theft. Like all workers, the bare minimum those workers are asking for is a fair day's pay for a fair day's work to get what is legally owed to them, but, unfortunately for them, that has not been the reality. One of the workers, Pema, told me that virtually every young person he knows has been either directly affected by wage theft or knows someone who has been. Another worker, Ben, who worked in the hospitality sector for 15 years, said that he has experienced wage theft throughout that entire period, whether that was being underpaid, not being paid for overtime, having unauthorised deductions taken from his pay and so on. Ben said that enough is enough and he is exactly right.

When wage theft is affecting one in four Queensland workers and taking more than \$2 billion out of Queensland workers' pockets each year in unpaid wages and superannuation, it is time to say that enough is enough. Far too often and for far too long the stories of wage theft and underpayment have continued unabated: \$20 million at Coles, \$9 million at Target, \$4 million at Bunnings, up to \$300 million at Woolworths, \$32 million at the Super Retail Group, over \$100 million at 7-Eleven, \$7.8 million courtesy of George Calombaris, and those are just the high-profile cases.

The Palaszczuk government was not going to stand by as Queensland workers continued to be ripped off and the federal government has sat on its hands and done nothing about rampant wage theft. That is why we set up the wage theft inquiry—an inquiry that those opposite voted against. It is why the Palaszczuk government has acted on the recommendations from that inquiry by introducing these new laws to criminalise wage theft and provide a simple, quick and low-cost wage recovery process so that affected workers can get back what is legally owed to them.

I also thank all of the organisations that made written submissions to the committee and those who appeared to give evidence to the inquiry. I acknowledge particularly the valuable contributions of the individual Queensland workers who participated in the inquiry and told their stories of wage theft—workers like Tara Small, who shared her experience as an 18-year-old in the hospitality industry in which she had to work for free for 12 to 14 hours a day at events.

Debate, on motion of Ms Grace, adjourned.