




Speech By
Jessica Pugh

MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE BILL

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (9.52 pm): My commitment to the small business sector is on record both in this House and in the Mount Ommaney community. Prior to being elected I spent most of my working life—and all of my life—in and around small business, and it is a family tradition that continues to this day. My little sister is the local barista at All Things Tasmanian in River Hills. Thanks to all the public servants who are working from home they are doing a roaring trade right now. They have literally never been busier. I am proud to say that my sister was single-handedly responsible for implementing social distancing measures in that shop before they were mandated by government. That is a great example of local businesses stepping up to the plate and innovating in this environment.

I know from speaking to locals, families and friends in the industry that, for most, conditions have never been tougher than they are right now. That is why the good leadership of government and community is important right now. I want to thank the Centenary & Districts Chamber of Commerce, my local chapter of the CCIQ, for their leadership under president Ada, vice-president Adam, Lisa Bailey and Louise Draper for their leadership of our community businesses. I use the word ‘community’ advisedly. I have seen so many businesses step up and help each other out in adapting to these social distancing changes and working together to come out the other side of COVID-19 stronger than ever so they can keep looking after our local community.

In Mount Ommaney, as you would all be aware, we have so many great local businesses and landlords, as the member for Surfers Paradise well knows, like Thilani Catering in Jindalee, Odontologica Dental in the Centenary suburbs and Envirochill, which is a home based innovative local business in Sinnamon Park. Yet another, Bailey Print Group, has retooled their business away from printing and they now make PPE. My favourite local brewery in Sumner Park now makes hand sanitiser too. Our Mount Ommaney locals love supporting these small businesses. You know that I host the small business awards every year, so I know that these legislative changes are going to be embraced by our—

Mr HART: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance.

Ms PUGH: We are not going to do this again, are we?

Mr HART: Yes, we are.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McArdle): Please resume your seat. A point of order has been made.

Mr HART: It is all very nice to hear all of this, but it has nothing to do with the bill.

Ms PUGH: This is the second time you have done this to me.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am going to ask you to sit down because I have not made a ruling yet on the point of order. I think you are straying a long way from the bill. You are talking about small business, but I do not see it relating to the terms of the bill, even in the explanatory notes. If you can come back to how your contribution in relation to small business directly relates to the bill, please proceed. Otherwise, move on to a second topic.

Ms PUGH: In particular, I am incredibly excited about the transition of our small business champion to our Small Business Commissioner. The transition from a small business champion to a small business commissioner will bring Queensland in line with New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia, which all currently have small business commissioners. In 2016 under the Palaszczuk government Labor created the Small Business Champion role to be a strong advocate for small business and representation at national discussions. This was after the LNP abolished the business commissioner and left Queensland businesses without an advocate.

I am really pleased to say that Ms Maree Adshead, Queensland's inaugural Small Business Champion, has been a passionate advocate for the sector since her appointment more than three years ago. I think she is an excellent choice to fill this new role. The need to strengthen and expand the role of the current part-time Small Business Champion was recognised late last year by key stakeholders, including small business and industry groups. The need for a commissioner was highlighted during recent discussions regarding our next small business strategy discussion paper—this was before the current crisis—and the need has only grown since then. Small businesses right across Queensland need vital support now to manage disputes with their landlords. Many have been forced to close their doors or innovate dramatically as a result of the pandemic. More than just an advocate, they need somebody with real power, real teeth, to mediate disputes—just like what happens in other jurisdictions.

One example is a clothing store at Kenilworth that has opted to close in order to comply with social distancing requirements. The owner has been told by the landlord that her lease is cancelled because she failed to open the store during trading hours. The landlord will not consider a rent reduction in this time either. This is just one of the many examples of businesses faced with situations that need professional advice and support to navigate leasing issues during these unprecedented times.

Already many small businesses have been reaching out to our hotline in need of support in navigating this process. We have asked tenants and landlords where possible to work together, but we know this is not always possible. When negotiations break down, small businesses currently have nowhere to turn. Legal channels are costly and our time-poor small businesses are hurting. Having a commissioner with the power to negotiate rental disputes will give small businesses a hand when they are most in need. I can think of many small Mount Ommaney businesses that do need this now during COVID-19. We are acting now in this current time of crisis when small businesses need this additional dispute resolution. I think it is really important during this time, but I think there are going to be long-term benefits for small business far beyond this COVID-19 crisis. It is for that reason that, as a former small business manager, I am so excited to see the introduction of a small business commissioner. I commend the bill to the House.