




Speech By
Joseph Kelly

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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CRIMINAL CODE AND OTHER LEGISLATION (WAGE THEFT) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (12.55 pm): I support the Criminal Code and Other Legislation (Wage Theft) Amendment Bill. I would like to start by thanking the committee and all of those people who took the time to make submissions to the inquiry into this bill. I would also like to particularly thank the minister for the work that she has done in relation to this bill.

At the core of Labor's values is a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. It is certainly at the front and centre of those values. Our community is rightly outraged when people commit theft of any sort. We should be significantly outraged when employers intentionally set out to deceive and to take money from workers who have put in a fair day's pay. When we look at the damage that is done in terms of the superannuation losses, we should understand that the damage is intergenerational. What is now a few hundred dollars will be a significant amount of money in four years time and it will mean a very different retirement for that particular worker. Employers who deliberately set out to steal wages are the target of this particular legislation.

The people who are most likely to have their wages stolen are those people who are vulnerable workers. Stealing wages also wrecks workers' confidence in terms of seeking further employment and making further contributions to our society. I can certainly relate to this. Twenty or so years ago as a relatively new employee I was in an environment where I really wanted to work and I really needed the job. I was building towards something else and this was an important part of gaining experience. I was like many workers in that I was put in a situation where the staffing arrangements were poor. We had patients to care for who were very, very sick. If we simply left our posts, those patients would have been in life-threatening situations.

Knowing this and having opportunities to avoid this, the employer chose to simply continue to operate in the same manner—put those patients in vulnerable situations and put pressure on us as workers to do double shifts. That was fine. We often agreed to do those double shifts because we had a deep concern for our patients. What was not fine was that the employer then attempted to threaten us and to emotionally blackmail us and to use all sorts of other tricks to try to get us to give up the additional pay that we were entitled to under the award the very next day and the sleep break from having done those double shifts. Anybody who has done 16 hours straight in an intensive care unit and does not think you need to go home and recuperate really needs to think quite seriously about that. When I questioned that practice, I was placed under immense strain and pressure from the employer. Thankfully, the Queensland nurses union stepped in and was able to provide support.

This legislation is also good for employers. The majority of our employers in this state are decent people. I will use a statistic from the member for Kawana: 99.9 per cent of employers—I do not know how true that is but I am basing it on what the member for Kawana has said—are trying to do the decent thing, the right thing, and I absolutely agree. I would think that those people want the ratbags and those

people who are out there stealing from workers out of the industry and no longer employers. Why? Because they are gaining an unfair advantage over the workers and the employers who are doing the right thing.

I would think that all of the decent employers I have met—and in my time it has been the absolute and utter majority of employers—want to do the right thing. They have concerns—deep concerns—for their customers and they have deep concerns for their employees, so those people would not want ratbags in the industry stealing money from workers. With those few words, I would like to say that this bill is a really good step in the right direction. I commend the bill to the House.