




Speech By
Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Record of Proceedings, 18 March 2020

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. SJ HINCHLIFFE** (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (8.38 pm): I rise to support the Public Health and Other Legislation (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Bill. Unlike the anaemic contribution from the Leader of the Opposition, my remarks will be focused on the bill and, in particular, the amendments relating to the 2020 local government quadrennial elections. In these extraordinary times, the Queensland community is looking to governments at all levels for stability, continuity, consistency and reassurance.

Mr Watts interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Order! Member for Toowoomba North.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Public confidence in our governments at all levels and in our democratic processes must be maintained. Today the government is taking urgent measures—

Mr Watts interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Order! Member for Toowoomba North.

Mr Watts interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Member for Toowoomba North, you are warned.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: The government is tonight taking urgent measures to maximise public safety, minimise public health risks and maintain our democratic processes for local government elections in the face of an evolving public health emergency. The bill before the House tonight provides the flexibility required to address the unique and unprecedented circumstances surrounding the 2020 council elections.

The Palaszczuk government is not taking these steps lightly. Local government has an essential role in delivering services and supporting communities. I have been working with the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and the Electoral Commission of Queensland to ensure our response meets the needs of the Queensland community in these challenging times.

As I informed the House on Tuesday, the Attorney-General and I had a phone hook-up with mayors and CEOs and other stakeholders from across Queensland earlier this week and discussed measures that have so far been put in place by the ECQ. In these discussions I foreshadowed the introduction of legislation that would give us the options we may need in relation to local government elections if things were to change. Councils, councillors, candidates and voters can be assured that our amendments address the current uncertainty around the quadrennial elections by providing for greater flexibility to meet the challenges that we may face.

As the Minister for Health has outlined, the measures are temporary and will only apply to the 2020 quadrennial local government election in order to maximise public safety and minimise public health risks associated with the public health emergency involving COVID-19.

The bill proposes a number of amendments to achieve the policy objectives. These amendments allow for the suspension or termination of the 2020 quadrennial local government election, if needed, and give options around the caretaker arrangements that will apply during a period of suspension; allow the time frame for the receipt of postal vote applications to be extended for certain electors; allow flexibility in deciding if a poll is to be conducted by postal ballot; ensure that there are no barriers to appropriately qualified persons being issuing officers; provide more flexible time frames for taking or resuming an adjourned poll; allow the declaration of another class of electors who can qualify for alternative voting methods; allow the Electoral Commission to give a direction about the distribution of how-to-vote cards or other election material, to prohibit a person from canvassing for votes in or near polling booths and to permit the display of political statements inside or within six metres of the entrance to a polling booth; to allow the making of regulations under the City of Brisbane Act 2010 or the Local Government Act 2009 if necessary about matters not sufficiently provided for in these acts as a result of the 2020 quadrennial local government election not being held in March 2020; allow the making of regulations under the Local Government Electoral Act 2011, if necessary, about matters not sufficiently provided for in the act to allow or facilitate the holding of the 2020 quadrennial local government election; provide flexibility in the filling of councillor vacancies that may arise if the election is not held in March 2020; and allow for the continuation of the Ipswich City Council and Logan City Council interim administrations if the election is significantly delayed.

The amendments achieve the key policy objective to provide flexibility, if required, in terms of the election date for the 2020 quadrennial local government election and the statutory processes surrounding the conduct of the election to help avoid the health risks and safety of individuals posed by this public health emergency. While these amendments enable the flexibility that might be needed, let me make it clear that at this point in time, based on public health advice, the Palaszczuk government is determined to deliver the 2020 local government elections on the current schedule.

At this point I would like to thank the Local Government Association of Queensland which today threw its strong support behind the government and behind 28 March being the final day of polling. I thank the hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders who have already voted. I urge people to make use of the extended early voting hours tonight, tomorrow night and this Saturday. I also want to thank those frontline health workers and other workers who are dealing with the significant impact of this global pandemic here in Queensland.

In relation to the contribution of this part of the bill that I have referred to tonight, I acknowledge the efforts of the officers of my department, especially Bronwyn Blagoev, to bring these urgent amendments to the House, to make sure that we see the certainty and delivery of quality local government in this state during these troubled and challenging times. As I said, these are truly extraordinary times, but times that need that continuity, that certainty, that assurance in local government. The bill delivers that continuity. I commend the bill to the House.