




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (EXTENSION OF EXPIRING PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (4.43 pm): I rise to support the extension of emergency powers. This Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill recognises that we are still in a health emergency and still in the middle of our COVID-19 response. When the COVID-19 Emergency Response Bill came through this House in 2020 the Premier herself said no-one should be without a place to call home, especially when we are all being asked to stay home. This bill recognises that we are still in a health emergency and that over the coming months we may be asked to stay home for days, for weeks—for however long it takes to keep us safe. We were in a snap lockdown just a month ago and, while the vaccine goes out in a staged process, we may very well find ourselves again in a lockdown.

This bill does nothing to include any provisions to make sure all Queenslanders have a safe place to call home. Clearly lacking from this bill are measures to provide housing support to Queenslanders who are sleeping rough, renters who are now facing evictions or people struggling to meet their mortgage repayments. When the COVID-19 legislation came through this House last year it included provisions to support renters here in Queensland, including an eviction moratorium. The government put aside its promise to finally reform Queensland's tenancy laws that continue to disadvantage renters, preventing them from putting down roots in their homes, exposing them to skyrocketing rents with no controls and allowing them to be booted out for no reason. It has apparently done so indefinitely. What we got instead as part of the COVID-19 response was nowhere near good enough.

After some intense lobbying by the well-funded real estate lobby, the so-called eviction moratorium was passed full of holes. The bill allowed rental deferrals rather than reductions, forcing families to sink into debt during a recession. Renters have been met with strict sets of eligibility criteria just to access COVID-19 protections. This government has not even deemed it important enough to extend any provisions in this bill to keep roofs over the heads of Queenslanders. If the government recognises the need to extend the powers of the Chief Health Officer, if the government recognises the need to extend mental health provisions, why then has the government stopped all emergency support for Queensland renters, for people struggling to meet their mortgage repayments and people sleeping rough? These concerns are set against an economic climate that is likely to get worse. Despite modest employment growth, unemployment in Queensland is at seven per cent which still represents thousands of families in dire conditions. These conditions will only get worse at the end of March given the drop in JobSeeker to just \$307 per week.

The government's minimal commitment to social housing has seen the social housing register balloon, a sharp increase in the people in the high-needs category since the COVID-19 pandemic started and 47,000 people—including 15,000 children—who are waiting for homes. Only one-third of those people who were housed in hotels during the height of the crisis have been moved into permanent housing. Everyone else is back on the streets or in insecure housing. I have spoken to people in my own electorate who are back on the streets after being in hotels. Given that there is nothing in this bill,

or anywhere else in the government's response, to house these Queenslanders, I would also ask what the government's plan is to contact and vaccinate those Queenslanders who have no fixed address. If we are in the middle of a health crisis, these support measures deemed essential just a few months ago should be extended, particularly as we are yet to see the full economic and social impacts of the crisis. Every Queenslanders deserves a home, particularly in the midst of a pandemic.