




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (11.59 am): In rising to speak to this bill, I want to take a moment to reflect on how much Queenslanders have been through over the past 18 months. Since the advent of the pandemic, Queenslanders have locked down, cancelled plans, masked up when asked to and headed in droves to get the vaccine, curbing transition of COVID-19. It has been amazing to see the line-up of people outside the convention centre in my electorate heading in to get the vaccine.

Queenslanders have been so accommodating of lockdowns, changed plans, check-ins and mask mandates without comprehensive welfare support. However, when the government recently cancelled the Ekka show holiday there was more than a hint of frustration in the community. I heard from so many Queenslanders frustrated about the loss of a chance to catch their breath and spend time with their loved ones. The government is planning to create another public holiday on 29 October, and I say why not give us two? Give Queenslanders an extra public holiday to make up for the one that we have missed. We could have a recreation day like in Tasmania. We could have New Year's Eve off. We could have a picnic day. We could have a Queensland arts day to give a boost to the arts industry that has been struggling so much over the course of the pandemic with so many talented Queenslanders out of work or leaving the industry.

Of course, any talk of public holidays has to take into account the needs of workers. Many Queenslanders in casual work, especially those in industries like hospitality, the arts, tourism, fitness and education, have been hit so hard by this pandemic. We urgently need to increase JobSeeker to at least \$1,100 a fortnight and implement JobKeeper 2.0 across all sectors to ensure workers are not left behind. This is something our Greens colleagues federally have been campaigning on. At the state level there is plenty more we can do.

No-one has had a tougher ride than renters during this pandemic. The housing crisis is getting worse almost every day here in Queensland with families across our state being pushed out of rental properties, struggling to find housing and being forced to live in tents and cars, and the pandemic is not over. With the highly contagious delta strain, there is a chance we could be in for another lockdown—another potential week or month of lost income for many Queenslanders. Again, this bill offers no protection for those who are at risk of losing their home during the next lockdown. There are no plans for an eviction moratorium, no rental support grants, no mortgage relief and no ban on unfair rent increases for manufactured home owners.

The act extends the regulation protecting commercial lessees, including preventing evictions and lease terminations for affected tenancies. However, for residential tenants—for their homes—there is no such protection. This is a pretty stark double standard and it is a slap in the face for the 1.8 million Queenslanders who rent. During the last lockdown the member for Maiwar and I wrote to the Premier, the Minister for Health and the Minister for Housing seeking an urgent intervention to support renters

by instituting an eviction moratorium, automatic lease extensions to ensure no lease ends during a lockdown and reopening the COVID-19 rental grant program, providing grants of up to \$2,000 to tenants affected by the pandemic who cannot access other income support.

There is also no protection in this bill for residents of manufactured home parks, now one of the only lower cost, long-term housing options for retirees and pensioners in our squeezed housing market. Market rent reviews were suspended by the government in the second half of 2020, temporarily stopping park owners from hiking up site rents above inflation. Now we have come into the 18th month of this pandemic and many are feeling the economic pain more than ever. Why do these low-income residents, pensioners and retirees not get the same protection? This is particularly concerning because if these parks become unaffordable to low-income retirees and pensioners, they will not be able to find many other affordable options in our current housing crisis. No-one should lose their home because of the pandemic. The government should be putting these protections in place now, not waiting for the crisis to worsen.

We are pleased to see teachers and other essential workers and pregnant people finally included in the priority category for vaccine access. The federal government's dangerously incompetent rollout has put Australia far behind the rest of the world. I urge the state government to ensure that the current vaccine hubs are fully staffed and resourced to ensure that all Queenslanders can access a vaccine as soon as possible. This has to include outreach to ensure that eligible people sleeping rough in vulnerable communities, including people who cannot leave their homes, can readily access vaccines.

Eighteen months into the pandemic and while Queenslanders have locked down, quarantined, masked up and checked in, putting us in a relatively good position at the moment, public health decisions are more politicised than ever. My colleague the member for Maiwar has moved amendments to this bill to establish a COVID-19 oversight committee as a committee of the Legislative Assembly. This committee would inquire into, and report on, the government's response to COVID-19. Made up of representatives from the government, the opposition and the crossbench, the committee would provide the necessary oversight to ensure public health measures are adopted in line with best evidence and in accordance with the highest community standards. I commend these amendments to the House.

If they lapse, the member for Maiwar and I will keep working to ensure that public health decisions are created in line with expert advice and free from politicisation. Eighteen months into this pandemic and working on behalf of the many Queenslanders whose lives have been disrupted, the only way through is to work together to ensure all Queenslanders are supported.