




Speech By
Dr Christian Rowan

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Record of Proceedings, 1 September 2021

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

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (3.59 pm): I rise to address the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2021. From the outset I indicate that, as the Liberal National Party's state member for Moggill, I will not be opposing this bill. The Liberal National Party accepts that the unique and continually evolving circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic warrant a comprehensive and ongoing public health response in order to keep Queenslanders safe from the COVID-19 virus and its mutant viral variants, including the delta strain. However, there is no doubt that many Queenslanders, including senior medical and health professionals, are growing increasingly concerned about the lack of transparency with respect to certain health decision-making processes, as well as an apparent opaqueness in relation to the accountability of those decisions with an apparent lack of broad and comprehensive input into state government decision-making processes and what that means for all Queenslanders, as well as for democratic government in our state.

As Emeritus Professor Rob Stable, a former director-general of Queensland Health, has previously stated in submissions to the Health and Environment Committee, in our state a multidisciplinary and broad Queensland health protection committee would be of significant benefit in delivering confidence and transparency in health decision-making processes. I continue to be concerned by the way in which the state Labor government has seemingly acted without openness and transparency. There has also been a lack of consistency, compassion and common sense by Labor with respect to the individual circumstances of many Queenslanders, including those requiring the management of complex chronic health conditions such as cancer and tertiary hospital surgical procedures, and those residents needing to either return to Queensland or have the support of essential health workers from other states.

There are also the significant mental health burden aspects and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which are profound. Recently, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, in their 2021-22 advocacy and policy priorities submission to the Queensland state Labor government, indicated that our state requires an additional investment of \$700 million per year into the mental health system.

I am also gravely concerned about the reports that I am receiving from medical specialist colleagues about the increasing prevalence of mental health conditions that are being seen in emergency departments, mental health services and within primary care and specialist general practice, as well as more broadly across our community. Many of those are existing conditions that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to being elected I was the deputy chief medical officer for UnitingCare Health. With the creation of additional deputy chief medical officer or deputy chief health officer positions, apart from those created to assist with COVID tracing and also management issues in our hospitals, one of those positions could have a portfolio of mental health. Certainly that is what the federal government has done in relation to one of their deputy CMO positions.

The Queensland state Labor government must publicly release the clinical advice relied upon when fundamental democratic rights are impacted upon or removed when responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. My constituents in the electorate of Moggill and all Queenslanders have made incredible sacrifices and endured much over the past 18 months. I want to particularly thank local residents in the western suburbs of Brisbane for their sacrifice and strict adherence to the public health measures, including during the recent Indooroopilly outbreak. However, what was clear during the recent Indooroopilly outbreak was that the state Labor government was not adequately prepared for implementing additional COVID-19 testing sites.

As a result, I urgently phoned the Deputy Premier and the Chief Health Officer, officially sent correspondence to the Queensland health minister and worked quickly with my colleagues the federal member for Ryan, Julian Simmonds, and the councillor for the Pullenvale Ward, Councillor Greg Adermann, to get the required additional testing facility established at the Moggill District Sports Park. I thank QML Pathology and, in particular, their Continuous Improvement Manager, Kevin Thomas, and all staff, for their work to establish this facility so promptly in collaboration with Queensland Health and the Brisbane City Council.

I note that amendments in the legislation will also address the rescheduling of the Ekka public holiday to 29 October 2021. At the time of this announcement it was absolutely clear that the Minister for Education had failed to adequately consult and communicate with school stakeholders, given the substantial impact the new date had on the well-established Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority's external assessment timetable. How do I know this?

Ms Grace: Absolute rubbish. You are making it up.

Dr ROWAN: I hear the minister interjecting from the other side of the chamber. I know it because on the day of the announcement my phone did not stop ringing as teachers, parents and school leaders were all completely blindsided by Labor's lack of consultation and communication. That is what was happening at my office.

Ms Grace: Absolute rubbish, rubbish, rubbish.

Dr ROWAN: I know the Minister for Education is interjecting, but she knows the truth. They were phoning. Even the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority were caught off guard as they were unable to provide concerned parents and teachers with an update on what would happen to students across Queensland who had no idea when their exams would be rescheduled to. Those parents, teachers and staff deserve better from the Palaszczuk state Labor government.

In conclusion, the further extension of expiring provisions as they relate to public health are necessary, but so too are the amendments to be moved by the LNP. I take this opportunity to encourage all Queenslanders, if they are eligible to have the vaccine, to be vaccinated. The vaccines are clinically efficacious and effective. They have gone through all the regulatory processes. I encourage all Queenslanders to take up the vaccine at the earliest opportunity.