




Speech By
Cynthia Lui

MEMBER FOR COOK

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

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (6.09 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2020. On behalf of my communities I want to extend my gratitude and appreciation to our Premier and to our Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young, for their strong leadership in making tough decisions under very extreme circumstances to keep Queenslanders safe.

With the strength demonstrated by our Premier and the strong health advice from our CHO, the Palaszczuk government took nothing for granted and made sure that no stone was left unturned when it came to making important decisions on how to respond to this global health emergency in a swift and decisive manner. I acknowledge our cabinet ministers and all members of parliament who all stood up to the plate, determined to work together to keep COVID out. However, I want to point out that Queensland's collaborative effort would not have been possible if it were not for our frontline heroes. Our frontline heroes stepped up for Queensland and were prepared to be at the coalface of this pandemic to protect and fight for Queensland. Talking to frontline workers in my electorate gave me the reassurance that we were in good hands.

Twelve months ago when we were watching how COVID-19 swept across the globe, it almost seemed like a bad dream. There is certainly no doubt that we had only one chance to get our COVID response right. We have seen what has happened overseas in that when an inadequate response occurs it costs lives. That is what is at stake and Queensland has done so well. My experience was people wanted reassurance and people wanted certainty for the future, and what played out in the media day in and day out in terms of the impact that COVID had on people's health gave us a glimpse of what could become of us—our community, our state. We knew that it was only a matter of time before COVID would come knocking on our door, and it did.

Representing the northern-most electorate of the state, many of my communities are regional and remote, thus elevating the risks for the most vulnerable groups in my electorate. No doubt the spread of COVID would have been devastating to the most vulnerable population in my electorate and we needed to do all we could to keep COVID-19 out of our local area. On 29 January 2020 Queensland declared a public health emergency under section 319 of the Public Health Act 2005 due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in China, its pandemic potential due to cases spreading to other countries and the public health implications within Queensland resulting from recently arrived travellers from the epicentre of the outbreak. The public health emergency was declared for all of Queensland under section 323 of the Public Health Act. The declared public health emergency was extended until 31 December 2020 through the making of several regulations and may need to be further extended.

In early 2020 the Legislative Assembly also passed several pieces of legislation to support the Queensland government's health response to COVID-19. The amendments made to chapter 8 of the Public Health Act allowed for the Governor in Council to extend the declared public health emergency for up to 90 days under the Public Health (Declared Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act 2020,

which received assent on 7 February 2020; increased powers for emergency officers and the Chief Health Officer to limit or respond to the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland; the chief executive to delegate their powers to the Chief Health Officer or person with expertise or experience in public health issues and improving the operation of the provisions of emergency officers to support the Queensland government's response to COVID-19; and people were required to enter hotel quarantine at their own cost under the Community Services Industry (Portable Long Service Leave) Act 2020, which received assent on 22 June 2020.

Despite overall low numbers of COVID-19 in Queensland, recent events in other Australian jurisdictions and continued large-scale outbreaks around the world serve as a clear reminder of how rapidly COVID-19 can spread and overwhelm hospital systems. Certain risks for community transmission in Queensland such as interstate cross-border travel will remain for as long as the virus continues to circulate in Australia.

I want to give a special shout-out to our Chief Health Officer for all of the tough decisions that she has made in this space. I am eternally grateful for all of her support that has resulted in the Cook electorate not having one case of COVID-19. Twelve months ago we knew what the risks were and what the implications would be for vulnerable people living in my electorate such as our First Nation communities as well as seniors and people with disabilities. Given that many of my communities are so regional and remote, every measure that this government took to safeguard communities right throughout Queensland reflected the results seen in Far North Queensland. I want to put on record my thanks and appreciation to this government because without its support the outcome could have been very different.

The reality is communities in the seat of Cook are almost literally on the doorstep of other countries. Saibai Island is only four kilometres away from Papua New Guinea. The risk of people travelling in and out of Cairns Airport and the risk of community transmission into our most vulnerable parts of Cape York and the Torres Strait was concerning, so the measures we took in terms of border closures and quarantine efforts determined the outcome in that we did not see any cases in my community. I am proud to be part of this government that puts people first. This is a story that I will always tell for years to come because economic recovery is just not possible if we do not put the health and wellbeing of people first. I stand with this government and commend this bill to the House.