




Speech By
Jennifer Howard

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Record of Proceedings, 2 September 2021

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

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (11.27 am): I rise to speak in support of the Public Health and Other Legislation (Further Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2021. We only have to see what is happening in New South Wales to get an idea of how quickly COVID-19 can consume a whole state and leak into other states and territories. While Queensland is currently enjoying COVID-free days, the threat across our border in New South Wales shows that we must always be on guard. Until an overwhelming majority of Queenslanders are vaccinated, emergency powers will be needed to ensure that we can rapidly mobilise our health system and government departments in response to any potential COVID-19 outbreak.

I am also pleased to see in this legislation the proposed introduction of appointing multiple deputy chief health officer positions in line with other jurisdictions in Australia. This will enhance our state's overall health response and ensure the Chief Health Officer and her deputy have the support they need to deal with all the challenges this pandemic throws at them.

This legislation will put in place some minor amendments including clarifying that quarantine directions may be served electronically, establishing a new prepayment system for quarantine fees and supporting more flexible payment and collection arrangements.

Since March last year we have given our Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young, emergency powers so that she can swiftly respond to COVID-19 outbreaks in Queensland. Because of her expert guidance and our first-rate public health response, Queensland has escaped the worst of this pandemic. However, the growing number of cases in other jurisdictions reminds us that Queensland is always at risk of COVID-19 crossing our border and coming into our communities. Extending these emergency powers is crucial considering how rapidly the delta variant can spread if not picked up early. We have seen it for ourselves with the last outbreak in Brisbane's western suburbs.

These emergency powers will be extended until 30 April next year so that we can continue dealing with localised outbreaks. On this point, I am encouraged by the number of people in my electorate of Ipswich who are either getting vaccinated or very keen to get vaccinated once the vaccine is available. They want to protect themselves and their loved ones. Furthermore, they want to play their part in helping the country get back on track.

People are desperate to get back to normal and getting vaccinated is the key. Vaccines offer us that hope we all need after what we have been enduring over the last 18 months. I want to point out that I have had my first AstraZeneca. I have my second tomorrow. My partner will be fully vaccinated as of now. My daughter, who is a doctor at the Gold Coast University Hospital, and her husband are fully vaccinated. My son, who lives in Melbourne, as soon as he was able to went out to get vaccinated.

Obviously I am incredibly proud of the work my daughter does as a doctor, as a frontline health worker, but I am also fearful for her. If the Prime Minister of this country and Karen Andrews, Michaelia Cash and those opposite have their way, she will be at serious risk as many frontline health workers have been across the world where this pandemic has been raging. Thousands of them have lost their lives while trying to save others.

I want to protect all of the frontline health workers in this state and keep them safe, including my daughter. My son, who is living in Melbourne, is up to his 215th day in lockdown. That is more than seven months that he has had to spend locked up inside when opportunities are passing him by. The despair that people in Victoria and New South Wales are living with—the increased rates of mental illness and the increased rates of suicide—is the reality of what happens if we let this virus rip without being vaccinated, without taking the proper steps.

We need look no further for a gold standard than our Premier's own performance, our Chief Health Officer's performance and our government's performance throughout this pandemic. I am really proud to be a part of a government that has taken such a strong stance on this, such a sensible stance and such a sound non-political response to this pandemic. I commend this bill to the House.