




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (3.25 pm): I rise today in support of the bill before House. At the outset, I wish to say what a wonderful job my community and I think the Chief Health Officer has done in her brave and considered leadership throughout this time. She has disseminated the information to help us as local members from both sides of the House to keep our communities informed.

I remember at about this time last year there was a bipartisan briefing attended by many members of this House. We were told that we could reasonably expect a quarter of the Queensland population to be infected with COVID and potentially expect up to 30,000 deaths. That is the entire electorate of one member sitting here today. I remember drawing breath, along with every single person in that room, as we tried to comprehend the magnitude of what could be to come.

One year on, many of us have just come from a similar briefing with the Chief Health Officer and the Minister for Health. Thankfully, that expectation has not come to pass. Instead, we have experienced six deaths and our state has led the way on a strong and united health response, thanks to our Chief Health Officer, our Premier and our community, who have, by and large, observed the restrictions so well that we have been able to keep our infection rates incredibly low.

Make no mistake: it has not been easy for the Queensland community. There is not a single member of my community or that of any member here that has not been impacted in some shape or form by COVID and the ensuing restrictions. Some of the most cumbersome restrictions have been felt on those three great life milestones—births, deaths and marriages.

During the pandemic, expectant parents were restricted in a number of ways, from not being able to tour hospital facilities to, at a certain point last year, being allowed only a certain number of birthing partners with them in the room when in labour. I was lucky that when I gave birth on New Year's Day those restrictions were no longer in place.

We have also seen maternity care change and evolve. Many mums rejoiced that we were no longer required to undertake the dreaded two-hour glucose test unless we had the diabetes markers. There are now studies afoot to determine whether this test needs to be reinstated at all as a routine test for expectant parents. That has been an unexpected benefit in improving medical care as a result of the innovation that COVID has required.

We also saw birthdays and birthday celebrations heavily affected at certain points throughout the year when restrictions on gatherings were in place. I recall that during April-May, in that first month of lockdown, I personally called older residents in my community who were celebrating milestone 70th or 80th birthdays to not only wish them a happy birthday but also commiserate with them and say, 'I am sorry. I am sure you were planning a special celebration probably with family and friends and I know that you will not be doing that anymore.' I remember speaking with a lovely woman from the Sherwood

RSL—I will not name her and she may not want me to say how old she is—who had been assisted by a member of the Sherwood RSL to set up Zoom so that she could celebrate that milestone birthday with her interstate family who could no longer attend.

I found from those phone calls—and I would have made over 100 in that month—that the overwhelming sentiment among our seniors celebrating significant birthdays was that they understood, even in the early days, the importance of doing the right thing and following the health advice. I know that funerals right around the country were also impacted. I am happy that, thanks to the compliance of Queenslanders, we are able to increase numbers at funerals and have farewells that are fitting for our loved ones.

Marriages looked very different during the height of COVID. I had a COVID-safe wedding in my backyard with fewer than 20 people and in compliance with the restrictions. I know that for a lot of couples COVID well and truly threw their marriage plans for 2020 into turmoil and they were not able to have the celebrations they had planned. For many couples it is really important that they have large cultural family celebrations and smaller celebrations like mine are not appropriate for them.

Unfortunately, this was necessary because it was quickly established that weddings, along with funerals, are super spreader events because of the intimacy and emotion of such days. It is very difficult to restrain from hugging a loved one at such a wonderfully exciting and emotional event such as a wedding or at something as sad and touching as a funeral. That is why it was important that those restrictions applied, even though they are major life events.

I want to share the story of a lovely local family in Westlake. Like many members of the House, I dealt with countless local people who wanted to follow the advice and wanted to do the right thing so they sought advice from my office. This family was trying to organise an international wedding over Zoom. They were doing it a little bit differently. The bride and groom were in the Mount Ommaney electorate but they had family overseas. They were going to invite the family to participate via Zoom. At that time some very heavy restrictions were in place. Unfortunately, we were not able to facilitate exactly what they wanted, but the family was so grateful that we had taken every possible step to facilitate the event for them. Even though we were not ultimately able to work through all of their issues they appreciated how hard we worked.

I thank the then health minister's office for his office's willingness to always answer the phone. Maddie Cunnington, in particular, did a wonderful job. She was always available to chat to and to work through the many issues that we were all dealing with.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear to Queenslanders why these powers to limit the size of gatherings are very important. Around the world we have seen horrendous numbers of deaths. The USA has just passed the sad milestone of half a million deaths. That is up 100,000 since the middle of January. The UK now sits at well over 100,000 deaths. That number is growing every single day.

Queenslanders have shown that they trust the government to make measured, considered decisions and that they trust the Chief Health Officer to make decisions around the limitations that are required to protect them. For that reason, I certainly commend the bill to the House.