




Speech By
Jessica Pugh

MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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**WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (4.30 pm): A few weeks ago in my electorate, not far from my home in Riverhills, there was a tragic collision. A motorcycle collided with a car and sadly the young man on the motorbike lost his life at the scene. Along with the rest of my community, my heart goes out to his family and friends. Our first responders were on the scene incredibly quickly and they did a wonderful job. When I checked in with our first responders a few days later it was clear that the incident had taken a toll on them—how could it not. Nobody in my community who drove past the accident that night was unaffected by it.

To provide that support for families at a time when they are going through, as the member for Redlands spoke about earlier with her family's experience, one of the most devastating days that a family can have is a skill, but it is one that exacts a price for our hardworking frontline staff who volunteer to carry out this role. It is not a sign of weakness to seek assistance when you do this job day in, day out. Asking for help is one of the strongest things you can do. By passing this bill we are normalising asking for help. We as a society and a parliament are recognising that it is completely understandable that being repeatedly exposed to traumatic events in your line of work may impact on your mental health and it is imperative that if it does you should be encouraged to reach out and seek help.

In my community, well past the time of an incident I have seen our local first responders reach out to the survivors of incidents such as house fires and help them. In fact, a few years ago, and I profiled this on my social media at the time, I took my youth member for Mount Ommaney to see the temporary home of our local fire station while we were upgrading our existing station. She requested that if I ever visited the local fire station that she be allowed to come with me because, in fact, her own house had burned down a few years ago and her younger brother had died in that fire.

At the station that day she met some of the officers who had responded to the fire and who had a better recollection of that event than she did because she was so traumatised by it. For one of the officers there it was the first fire that he ever went to. It was his first ever call-out. He was so kind, lovely and gentle in speaking with Cheska. He made the offer to speak with her further if she ever wanted to. It impressed upon me what a special group of people it is who put their hand up to be frontline responders and how they deserve our support and our respect. I am so glad that we are able to do that by passing this bill today.

As we know, this bill allows first responders and eligible employees of first responder agencies suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, to get easier access to necessary support and compensation by reversing that onus of proof and deeming their injury to be work related while leaving open the opportunity for evidence based rebuttal if it is found that, in fact, that injury did not occur in the workplace. We know that from 1 July 2019 to 31 May 2020 there were 113 PTSD claims in the public sector, with 29 claims from the Queensland Police Service reflecting their exposure to time critical and

life threatening incidents. Of these 113 claims, 92 were accepted for first responders, noting that these claims tend to be more serious with longer durations. There was an average of 208 work days lost. These more serious incidents do have lower return-to-work outcomes.

I have spoken before in this House about suicide. It is an issue that is close to my heart. I suspect it is an issue that is close to the hearts of many in this House. We know that it is the No. 1 cause of death in men aged 18 to 45 and we know that first responders have a significantly higher rate of PTSD than the general community. As I said before, normalising the provision of support for frontline workers with PTSD is critical to ensuring that our frontline staff know that they can and they should seek help when they need it. I finish by thanking the many first responders who have shared their stories with me as their local member. These stories are private, they are not for sharing in this parliament, but nonetheless they have been instrumental in bringing about the changes that we are seeing today to ensure that our frontline Public Service staff get the help and the support that they need and that they deserve. I commend this bill to the House and I commend the public servants, the doctors, the nurses, the police, the ambulance officers, the fireies, the custodial staff and so many more who look after our community.