




Speech By  
**Kim Richards**

**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

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Record of Proceedings, 11 May 2021

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

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (12.10 pm): I support the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. Listening to the contribution from the member for Kawana was like listening to a broken record. When one looks at the track record of those opposite in IR when they were in government there is not a lot to cheer about. In contrast, our Palaszczuk government will always back our frontline workers.

As the minister said, we have a very healthy and robust scheme in place. This legislation builds on the additional work that we did around establishing the Workers' Psychological Support Service to provide additional support to workers who have experienced a work related psychological injury. It also builds on the amendment that we made to the definition of injury for psychiatric and psychological disorders and providing early access to those services for psychologically injured workers while they are waiting for their claim to be determined. I think that is a really important change that was made to allow quick access to much needed services.

As the chair of the committee, I thank the former committee for the work that they undertook prior to the bill lapsing. I thank our secretariat and my committee for their work, particularly the deputy chair, the member for Southern Downs, who I hope is doing well while he is on leave. I thank the minister for her consideration of our committee's report and the amendments that are proposed in consideration in detail and any other considerations that come forward in the future review process. I think the minister's response to our recommendations was extraordinarily detailed and provided great clarity. There is no worker who is disadvantaged by the scheme and the process.

As was mentioned by the member for Kawana, I cannot imagine the trauma that our frontline responders go through. One only needs to read the newspapers to see some of the most horrific domestic and family violence incidents being responded to. As I was reflecting on this bill and the sorts of issues that police officers face, I remembered the police officer who knocked on my door one Sunday afternoon to tell me that my dad had passed away. He had attended the scene of the accident. There could be nothing more traumatic than having to do that. I cannot imagine what it is like for somebody to have to undertake that job on a regular basis.

Our first responders in all industries do an incredible job keeping Queenslanders safe. They often are exposed to traumatic situations where their lives are on the line and where they are responsible for the lives of other people. This undoubtedly has a mental health impact and although laws exist for our first responders to seek compensation for the permanent stress caused, we know that this process can often be challenging and frequently puts workers through further unnecessary stress.

Our committee incorporated the submissions made on the initial bill. We had submitters from the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union, the United Workers Union, the United Firefighters Union, the CFMMEU, the Queensland Council of Unions, the Australian Medical Association, Together Queensland, the Queensland Law Society, the

Electrical Trades Union, the Australian Workers' Union, Associate Professor Linda Crowley-Cyr from the School of Law and Justice at the University of Southern Queensland, the Services Union and Mr Brian Ranse. All submitters were offered the opportunity to make supplementary submissions. We received further submissions from the United Firefighters Union and the AMAQ. I thank the witnesses who attended our public hearing for the stories that they shared, particularly Professor Chris Perry from the AMAQ who told us of the experiences of doctors and nurses on the front line in the emergency department. They deal with extraordinarily traumatic incidents. I also acknowledge Nate Tosh from the United Firefighters Union for the stories that he shared on the day. I thank the department for the briefing that they gave to our committee.

This legislation responds to the Beyond Blue 2018 report, *Answering the call: national survey—Beyond Blue's national mental health and wellbeing study of police and emergency services*. It revealed what we all know and that is that there are substantially higher rates of psychological distress and mental health conditions, suicidal thinking and planning among our first responders compared to the general population and that claim rates related to mental health conditions or psychological injuries for first responders is 10 times higher than that of the average Australian workforce.

This legislation also responds to the 2019 report of the Commonwealth Senate inquiry into first responders' health, *The people behind 000: mental health of our first responders*, which recognised the need for early intervention and mental health support, and made recommendations across the areas of prevalence reporting and management of first responder psychological injuries, workers compensation, return to work and post-retirement support.

I know having spoken with local police and paramedics in my community that they are fully supportive of these legislative amendments. As I said, we cannot even begin to imagine the situations they respond to. By changing the legislative test for the mental injury to be presumptive will alleviate some of the stress caused to our first responders who struggle with PTSD. It will make the process of receiving compensation for damages experienced less stressful for our police officers, paramedics, child protection officers, corrective services officers, firefighters—including, importantly, our volunteer and rural fire brigades that also do an incredible job—State Emergency Service members, doctors and nurses—particularly in emergency and trauma care and acute care—authorised officers within Child Safety and Youth Justice staff—the minister touched on some of the experiences of staff in that department and some of the circumstances they attend—and eligible employees who work for departments that perform those roles and expose them to repeated or extreme details of traumatic incidents. The amendment will also support coalmine first responders who do an incredible job in extremely complex situations.

During the committee's public hearing it was interesting to note the contribution from Mr Luke Murphy from the Queensland Law Society. He was discussing the current legislative process. He said—

I have had to say to applicants that I believe they are entitled to it—

compensation—

but it is just not commercially viable for them to run it. Fees of over \$100,000 will be incurred in having to run a review application, because they will run for a number of weeks. You are never going to get that back. You cannot recover that even if you are successful in the industrial commission, because the costs you recover are restricted to Magistrates Court scale E.

We are seeing a growing number of jurisdictions adopt similar reforms, such as Tasmania and the Northern Territory, and it is good to see that Queensland is following in their footsteps. The reforms will go a long way towards continuing to fight and tackle PTSD mental health problems in Queensland. It is through legislation such as this that we will help remove the stigma around mental health issues and create an environment where sufferers of mental health problems like PTSD are more comfortable about seeking the support they need. It is about backing our frontline workers and helping them to get the help they need.

This past year throughout COVID has been incredibly tough for so many first responders. The challenges have always been there. Through strong reforms such as this the Palaszczuk Labor government is putting the lives and needs of our first responders first and foremost, making sure that these workers and their families are given access to the financial support and compensation they may need. The Palaszczuk government will always put workers and their health first. I commend this bill to the House.