




Speech By
Kim Richards

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

Record of Proceedings, 18 November 2021

**JUSTICE LEGISLATION (COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE—PERMANENCY)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (12.09 pm): I rise in support of the Justice Legislation COVID-19 Emergency Response—Permanency) Amendment Bill 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it opportunities to work in new and innovative ways that we have not been required to consider before. I reflect on my previous career. The question mark in relation to productivity always hung over having flexible working arrangements. One good thing that has come out of the pandemic is that we have proven that flexible working arrangements are absolutely achievable, and they are achievable in many different ways. I think there are a lot of people in this place who would not have minded shares in Zoom or Teams prior to the pandemic.

This legislation is modernising longstanding legal practices relating to document execution. I take this opportunity to give a shout-out to all of our incredible justices of the peace. In recent months I have had the opportunity to present a number of 50-year and 40-year service certificates. They certainly make a very big contribution to our community.

There are other aspects of the bill that I am particularly interested in, which affect the lives of everyday Queenslanders. Referring back to the significant changes in the way that we are living today, I do not think anybody sitting around the Christmas table in 2019 could have imagined what these last two years had in store for us. Domestic and family violence has been on the increase through the pandemic, so the amendments that address the domestic and family violence reforms are important. We know that almost one in 10 women in a relationship experienced domestic violence during the pandemic, with many reports that the violence and coercive control increased. This is an extraordinary statistic to reflect on.

While I am on my feet, I take the opportunity to thank Stacey and the team at The Centre for Women & Co. I know the Attorney-General concurs with the amazing work that they do across both of our regions. Their crisis response team is incredible. They are passionate and work in some of the most challenging sets of circumstances, so I commend them on their work.

Domestic and family violence is an issue that exists across Queensland. I do not think there is an electorate that is represented in this parliament that does not know the impact it is having on our communities. The Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012 sets out the legislative framework for providing civil protection from domestic and family violence through domestic violence orders and police protection notices. Applications for domestic violence orders are made to a Magistrates Court and can be made by the aggrieved, a police officer or an authorised person, or another person acting for an aggrieved.

Ordinarily, private applicants—an applicant who is not a police officer—must verify an application for a domestic violence order by way of a signed and witnessed statutory declaration before a lawyer, a JP or a commissioner of declarations or other persons authorised by the Oaths Act 1867. A private applicant may then file the application with the court by delivering the application personally, or by post,

to the registry. This bill puts in place modernised arrangements to reduce physical contact between persons to support social distancing, self-quarantine and self-isolation requirements under the Queensland Chief Health Officer's public health directions.

The bill also modernises, streamlines and increases accessibility to domestic and family violence proceedings by providing for alternative verification arrangements for private applications for protection orders and variations of domestic violence orders in urgent situations, allowing domestic and family violence proceedings by audiovisual link or audio link, and allowing electronic filing of documents in domestic and family violence proceedings where electronic filing of documents is approved by the principal registrar. In this way, the bill proposes to continue accessibility in domestic and family violence proceedings by making permanent measures largely based on the temporary arrangements to allow for: domestic and family violence matters to be heard via video or audio link at the court's discretion, alternative verification processes for temporary protection orders in urgent situations, and electronic filing where approved by the principal registrar.

Our government has responded by ensuring ongoing access and flexibility for those seeking protection from domestic and family violence by introducing temporary measures during COVID-19 to reduce physical contact between persons seeking protection or responding to an application for a domestic violence order, and this bill extends these protections to the people of Queensland. Such important legislative reforms will continue to have a positive impact on the lives of those vulnerable Queenslanders currently experiencing domestic and family violence.

I turn to the section on leases. This area of reform that the bill addresses is one that affects many Queenslanders and specifically many small businesses across the state. I take this opportunity to commend the work of the Queensland Small Business Commissioner, Maree Adshead. Her incredible work and advocacy throughout this pandemic in supporting small businesses has been extraordinary. The workload that she has experienced in supporting small businesses has been extraordinarily important. I know that in my electorate, she assisted a number of small businesses with complex leasing issues.

We know that small businesses have done it tough through the pandemic and, as a government, we have to support them now to help them rebuild and get back on their feet. These lease reforms in the bill will extend the expiry of the leases regulation and any other regulation until two years after that date, unless it is repealed sooner. This will allow the Queensland Small Business Commissioner to continue to provide mediation services in respect of eligible lease disputes. That includes affected lease disputes and small business tenancy disputes, as currently defined in the leases regulation, until such time as the permanent statutory office is established.

Further, we know that over 30 per cent of Queenslanders rent the home that they live in. The bill will assist those tenants who have tenancy disputes in an ongoing capacity. The bill will also amend the COVID-19 Emergency Response Act 2020 to extend the operation of the Retail Shop Leases and Other Commercial Leases (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Regulation 2020 until 30 April 2024, unless it is ended sooner. Ultimately, this bill will allow the Queensland Small Business Commissioner to continue to provide crucial mediation services in commercial leasing disputes and to continue to advocate for all Queensland small businesses.

We have heard from many in this debate with regards to the provisions that will allow continued takeaway of wine from our restaurants and cafes with their meal. We have heard also about the support that this provision has given to many of our restaurants and cafes. I take this opportunity to thank all of the cafes, restaurants, pubs and clubs in my electorate that have shown extraordinary resilience and continue to keep servicing our Redlands community.

In conclusion, these amendments create stability for the community and have real-life impacts on Queenslanders across our state. From women seeking protections from domestic and family violence to small business owners seeking to negotiate the terms of their tenancies, the reforms that this bill extends will have a positive impact on our state and the people who live within it.

I commend the Attorney-General for bringing this bill to the House. I congratulate the committee and the secretariat on their work. I commend this bill to the House.