




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

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

 **Mr McCALLUM** (Bundamba—ALP) (12.52 pm): I rise in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The Palaszczuk government continues to back Queensland workers as part of our ongoing economic and employment recovery from the COVID pandemic. Central to these efforts are our first responders—frontline Queensland workers who each and every day are exposed to incidents the likes of which most of us could never imagine. Attending these incidents can often take a toll on the mental health and wellbeing of our first responders. It can cost them their jobs, their families and sometimes tragically their own lives.

Today—on the eve of International Nurses Day—we are making it easier for Queensland first responders who develop post-traumatic stress disorder to access support and care under the state's workers compensation scheme. We are acknowledging the essential work performed by these men and women and the impact the ongoing exposure to trauma can have on them and their families. We are backing our police like those at Goodna; our ambulance officers and paramedics like those at Redbank; our firefighters like those at Bundamba and Ripley; and our child safety workers, correctional officers, emergency nurses and medical practitioners at Ipswich and right throughout Queensland. Emergency dispatchers and other people in first responder agencies whose work involves experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to traumatic events are also covered by this legislation.

These important amendments to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 include presumptive workers compensation laws for first responders who are diagnosed with PTSD. That means first responders and other prescribed workers and volunteers will not have to prove that their injury is work related. By reversing the onus of proof, a specific injury like PTSD is deemed to be work related unless there is evidence to the contrary. If the presumption does not apply, workers are still entitled to lodge a claim for a work related injury under the scheme's existing measures. Similar laws have been previously passed in Tasmania and the Northern Territory, and today Queensland joins them, providing important support for the long-term mental health, rehabilitation and safe return to work of first responders with PTSD.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Education, Employment and Training Committee in examining the bill. I also acknowledge the minister's comments that the government supports including local government and mines rescue team members and undertaking a 12-month review into the scope and operation of this bill. Mines rescue team members and local government workers in like-for-like emergency responder roles such as firefighters and paramedics were intended to be included by the bill. The amendments that will be moved during consideration in detail will clarify their inclusion. The 12-month review into the bill will also allow the scheme to develop so we can examine the effectiveness of these laws and the appropriateness of including other occupations that meet the definitions of first responder or eligible employee. I am happy about that and I support that 12-month review.

These changes follow an independent review of our workers compensation process and national reviews into first responder mental health by Beyond Blue, which does amazing work. The streamlined approach improves first responders' experiences across the entire claims process—from entry into the scheme to rehabilitation and return-to-work opportunities. It acts on recommendations made in Beyond Blue's 2018 report *Answering the call* that found substantially higher rates of psychological distress, mental health conditions and suicidal thinking and planning among first responders compared to the general population.

This bill builds on the strong record of the Palaszczuk government in delivering for Queensland workers. When it comes to workers compensation, we back our workers. We have restored the rights of injured workers to seek common-law damages without having to meet an impairment threshold. We have reversed breaches of privacy whereby employers could previously obtain a prospective worker's claims history. We have introduced new provisions that deem certain cancers for firefighters work related. We have introduced a new workers compensation capacity certificate that focuses on what injured workers can do rather than what they cannot do.

We have maintained the lowest average premium rate of any Australian state or territory for our scheme. We have covered apprentices at no cost to employers that has resulted in savings of \$105 million to Queensland employers. WorkCover Queensland is fully solvent with a funding ratio of 152 per cent according to their last annual report. We have also established the Workers' Psychological Support Service to provide additional support to workers who have experienced a work related psychological injury, and we have provided free health screening for stone benchtop workers who are at risk of silicosis.

While we are focused on protecting Queensland workers, unfortunately the federal LNP government is attacking them. In March this year we saw the Morrison government's IR omnibus bill that wanted to strip workers' rights through greenfields agreements, bargaining and the basic rights of part-time workers. Faced with a lack of support for the bill, the Morrison government focused on entrenching insecure work and removed the only aspect of the bill which was agreed to by unions and employers—laws aimed at reducing wage theft—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Member for Bundamba, I ask you to come back to the long title of the bill.

Mr McCALLUM: Indeed. If ever there were proof that the LNP has no respect ordinary workers, this is it. We are a government that continues to support all Queensland workers. Earlier this month we announced an investigation into sexual harassment protection for workers as part of a review of our industrial relations laws. Importantly, it will also investigate protections for workers in short-term employment. The bill before the House today follows our Australian-first legislation to make industrial manslaughter an offence, which now carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in jail and fines of up to \$10 million. We made wage theft a crime, and we made it easier for workers to recover lost wages.

Our nation-leading labour hire licensing laws protect workers from exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous providers. We have delivered substantial reforms to mine safety and built fair wages into major infrastructure projects. We have delivered portable long service leave for Queensland's 40,000 community sector workers—most of them women—and the nation's first paid domestic and family violence leave. We have also improved our workers compensation laws and restored rights stripped away by those opposite when they were last in government.

We are about keeping, helping and supporting Queenslanders both in and out of the workplace. That is exactly what this bill helps achieve. I am very proud to commend the bill to the House.