




Speech By
Hon. Leeanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Record of Proceedings, 20 April 2021

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts) (5.08 pm): I rise to speak in support of the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. We all know that this has been a particularly challenging year. While Queensland has led the country in our response to the pandemic, it is obvious from overseas experience that we cannot be complacent. Like many people in this House, there are stories from 2021 and 2020 that will stay with us right into the decades ahead of us.

As a former high school teacher who had the opportunity to teach in East London in the early 1990s, I have had the chance to continue those relationships with young students and teachers from across the UK. Facebook is an amazing thing; it keeps you connected to people and connected to their stories. Certainly the stories from the UK over the last 12 months and more have been quite heartbreaking.

As they follow our story in Queensland, there is almost an envy at the way we have been able to manage the pandemic and continue to be open as much as we have. During our last three-day lockdown, some of the conversations amongst my group of friends and former students over social media very much praised the way we in Queensland have been able to manage the pandemic. Tonight, as I stand—

Ms Grace: Three months.

Ms ENOCH: That is right. I take that interjection from the member for McConnel. They have had three-month lockdowns and are only just now able to go out into public venues and share a beer, a cold drink or a cup of tea with each other in public. It takes a huge toll not only on businesses but also on the personal lives of those impacted and their families.

Queensland was the first to move on a number of aspects with regard to COVID-19 and managing the pandemic. In January last year, we were the first state to declare a health emergency. On top of that, in understanding where the impacts were going to be as a result of the pandemic, we were one of the first states to move in terms of responding to issues related to the arts industry. The arts industry was one of the first hit when gigs and shows were cancelled overnight as a result of the necessary health restrictions put in place to protect everybody. We in Queensland are now reaping the benefits of that.

On top of that, everyone deserves a safe, secure and stable place to live. This bill will allow important protections to continue for Queenslanders affected by the impacts of COVID-19 who rent their home. It also extends protections to 30 September 2021 for people who live in manufactured homes. COVID-19 had a huge impact on people across the globe. The Palaszczuk government acted quickly to implement protections for many of our most vulnerable citizens. New protections were legislated as part of our COVID response for people who rent their home through changes to the

Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation (COVID-19 Emergency Response) Regulation 2020. The COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will ensure this support is extended.

Important temporary regulatory measures that have helped keep people safe and secure in their homes will now be extended to 30 September 2021. This will give Queenslanders stability and certainty. It is vital that we extend the COVID-19 emergency response legislation to ensure Queensland is in the best position to continue to respond to COVID-19 and to keep Queenslanders safe. The changes we implemented last year have helped prevent people becoming homeless and supported them to have a safe place to self-isolate during vital lockdowns.

To support government decision-making, the COVID-19 Housing Security Subcommittee of the Ministerial Housing Council was established to oversee implementation of the COVID-19 response and to provide real-time insights about what was happening in the sector. The subcommittee, made up of key sector leaders, quickly established a framework to monitor the private rental market and evaluate the COVID-19 response to complement anecdotal information provided by members. I acknowledge all those leaders from across the housing sector who were able to work in a collaborative way and provide the vital information that helped formulate the protections we were able to put in place for people. This information included indicators such as contact volumes to the Residential Tenancies Authority and key stakeholders and conciliation data including the number of COVID-19 conciliation requests, topics and resolution rate. The RTA's latest COVID-19 conciliation data shows that tenants and property owners had worked together to resolve some 1,950 disputes since April 2020, which is phenomenal.

This bill is part of our plan to keep Queensland ready to respond to COVID-19 risks as the economy recovers and we transition back to normal residential tenancy arrangements. It includes extending measures that prevent renters who suffered excessive hardship because of COVID-19 from being listed in a tenancy database for COVID-19 rent arrears. Some people have had to move out of their rental properties due to the financial impacts of the pandemic. The measures in the bill mean that eligible tenants who have lost 75 per cent or more of their income and have less than \$5,000 in savings have extended protections for limits on re-letting costs if they end their fixed-term leases early.

We know the risks faced by women and children who live with domestic and family violence. This legislation is so important as it extends protections for renters experiencing domestic and family violence to leave a residential lease quickly and safely, with limited liability for end-of-lease costs. The bill will also continue an important measure for older Queenslanders who live in manufactured homes. The extension will preserve regulatory provisions which allow home owners and park owners to hold meetings using audio or audiovisual technology. It seems like a very simple measure, but it is something that has made a huge difference in ensuring home owners and park owners are able to talk and protect each other's rights in amongst everything that is happening. Without these provisions, a range of meetings would be required by legislation to occur face to face. Being able to meet through Zoom, Teams et cetera—these new concepts to the member for McConnell that she mentioned earlier—and all of those things—

Ms Grace: We are experts now!

Ms ENOCH: That is right. These are able to be used to ensure those home owners are kept safe. Continuation of these provisions will ensure these vulnerable Queenslanders are able to feel safe and to socially distance appropriately during periods of heightened risk.

By extending the emergency legislation, the government is able to adjust temporary regulatory responses to be well targeted to current COVID-19 risks and impacts or to rapidly implement new measures that may be called for by renters, lessors and real estate businesses in Queensland's rental market or by manufactured home owners and industry representatives. I acknowledge the committee for its hard work in all of this—the chair, the member for Logan, who is always an outstanding chair, and all of the members of the committee who contributed to this.

Finally, obviously other work has been happening to ensure we continue to stay open as a state and our businesses can continue operating. The Queensland government check-in app is one of those tools we have been able to implement. It has had huge success. I encourage all hospitality businesses to make sure they meet that deadline of 1 May by registering for the Check In Qld app. I hope that more Queenslanders engage in this process. I commend the bill to the House.