




Speech By
Hon. Mark Bailey

MEMBER FOR MILLER

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

 **Hon. MC BAILEY** (Miller—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (3.47 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Justice Legislation (COVID-19 Emergency Response—Permanency) Amendment Bill 2021. I think it is pretty clear that the COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted nearly every aspect of our lives, but here in Queensland we have had one of the best health responses in the nation, even across the globe, with only seven COVID deaths throughout the pandemic so far. That is quite an achievement. We have known from day one that the best health response is also the best economic response, when we were the first state in Australia to declare a health emergency in January last year. Queensland's strong borders and health response have saved many Queensland lives and many Queensland jobs. Just ask someone in New South Wales and Victoria, where long lockdowns have had a tremendous economic cost. In Queensland we have been able to continue relatively normally compared to the southern states with the difficulties they have found themselves in.

Whether it is physical distancing, being separated from loved ones or work-from-home arrangements, Queenslanders have been magnificent in adapting to a very challenging and difficult situation. As a government we have had to adjust how we deliver services to thousands of Queenslanders. As a result of the lockdowns and restrictions on meeting in person, individuals, businesses and government have been required to adapt to technology to find new ways of working without being physically present.

The bill will mean that temporary measures to ease and make processes simpler will be made permanent. For example, this bill will mean that documents can be signed and witnessed electronically with simplified execution requirements. This bill modernises arrangements for the making, signing and witnessing of affidavits, statutory declarations, general powers of attorney for businesses, deeds and particular mortgages by allowing these documents to be made in electronic form, signed electronically and witnessed over audiovisual link in certain circumstances.

I think this is a good example of innovation coming out of necessity. We have seen that a lot of things that would have taken a lot longer for people to adapt to and understand have been accelerated due to necessity. While some of that has been difficult, some of that has also been very helpful and I think that is worth noting. These are the small things that become critical and important in keeping our society and our economy rolling during a time of crisis.

The bill will also permanently implement the ability for nurses and doctors to sign a certificate which forms part of an advance health directive stating that the person making the document appears to have capacity to make the document. The purpose of the reforms is to modernise the way in which important legal documents are created, making it easier and more accessible for everyday Queenslanders.

The DFV COVID regulation put in place reduced the need for 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 modernises, streamlines and increases

accessibility to DFV proceedings by providing for alternative verification arrangements for private applications for protection orders and variations of domestic violence orders in urgent situations, allowing DFV proceedings by audiovisual link or audio link and allowing electronic filing of documents in DFV proceedings. Members of the House would very strongly support those proceedings being improved in those ways.

We thank Queenslanders for their resolute efforts in helping us smash the curve. We thank them for their patience as we have sought to work around some of these issues. I would like to say how magnificent it is that Queenslanders have tuned in to the very important issues from early on and have responded very well to working collaboratively with government to be part of this solution. One of the things about this pandemic is that it has been an incredible challenge and the only way out of it is collective action—actually working together in a collective way. I know that challenges some people with very strong ideologies about individual freedom, but the reality is that this is a matter of science and medicine and it discriminates against nobody. It is only through collective action in this regard that we are going to come out of this pandemic.

Queenslanders have understood that on the whole intuitively and have done their own research and have worked with the government. When we look at other governments and other societies around the world, we can see that in the end there has actually been a lot of faith in government here in Queensland and in other states. We are way ahead of a lot of other countries around the world where their vaccination rates have stalled because of some very partisan ways of interpreting things and people taking short-term thinking to what is a profound crisis across the world.

As a state that is very subject to extreme weather events—with cyclones, bushfires and floods—Queenslanders understand what collective action is about when we have got our backs against the wall. That does not say that we do not as a people criticise government and are afraid to stand up—we certainly do—but when the chips are down we understand that working together is absolutely critical. Queenslanders ought to be praised and congratulated for working with us on that. As for the protesters outside, less so, I have to say. The reality is that this pandemic is largely a pandemic on the unvaccinated at this point. Those people who have anti-vaccination views ought to look at the fourth wave in Germany, where it is cutting a swathe through the anti-vax communities. The death rate there is higher in the fourth wave than any previous wave.

You cannot make people do some things, but there have been some incredibly tragic consequences. We are not out of this yet. There is time for people to look at this issue in detail and change their minds because when you are exposed to COVID, especially if you have a health condition, you want to be vaccinated because it is bad news, to state the obvious.

We thank Queenslanders for their resolute efforts in helping us smash the curve. We thank them for their patience as we have sought to work around some of these issues. There will be more; there is still substantial public debate. It is disappointing, to be quite frank, to see the Leader of the Opposition continue to not listen to health advice in public debate. The recent border measures have been put in place because of cautious health advice about minimising risk of people coming into this state. To see it politicised at this late stage in the pandemic but with some way to go is very disappointing to say the least. That is not leadership. It is not understanding the issue. It is putting your own short-term interests ahead of the interests of the health of Queenslanders.

I hope we do not have any more deaths in this pandemic, but I suspect that is a distinct possibility. We all should be working to minimise the risk of that to Queenslanders, and short-term political shots undermining the health advice after nearly two years of this pandemic is disgraceful. That is not leadership, and it would be remiss of me not to point that out in this debate.

I thought wrongly at the beginning of this pandemic that something this challenging and in a lot of ways metaphysical as well as being a physical challenge to people's health would rewrite politics—that there would be a kind of a collaboration and consensus that we had not seen before—but that has not eventuated. That is a sad thing when people's health is at stake. We have now lost more than five million people across the world. The fact that some people have been unable to put away their short-term political interests for the health of people has been disappointing.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BAILEY: I hear groans from the opposition who clearly have self-identified themselves as being some of the culprits there. They can interject all they like, but the reality is that without the strong leadership from the Premier and the Chief Health Officer this state would look very different, especially if they had taken the advice of the member for Broadwater when he bagged our world-leading response.

That is why it is necessary for governments to be armed with the tools necessary to respond to this changing environment for the benefit of all Queenslanders. This is in recognition of the fact that the bill proposes an extraordinary power to deal with an extraordinary crisis. However, it also bespeaks

hope that we might soon be through the worst of this pandemic. I kind of think we are 39 kilometres into a 42-kilometre marathon. We are not out of it yet. It is still taxing, but we are getting close. I commend the bill to the House.