




Speech By
Hon. Mark Ryan

MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

Record of Proceedings, 11 May 2021

WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. MT RYAN** (Morayfield—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services) (4.17 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill has a number of critical elements that work together to produce what is in essence a very simple but very important goal. This bill is about caring for those who care for us. It is about caring for the people who take care of all Queenslanders. It is about caring for our first responders. We see our police, firefighters, emergency services officers, staff and volunteers, correctional officers, community corrections officers and paramedics all working in the community every day to keep us safe. Their presence is an everyday constant. So familiar are we with their reassuring presence that it would be possible to take that presence for granted, but we must never do that. This Labor government never will do that.

We have seen over the past year just how vital our frontline people are when crisis strikes. It has been our frontline people—first responders, police officers and staff, firefighters, emergency services staff, officers and volunteers, paramedics, custodial officers and community corrections staff and officers—who have kept Queenslanders safe during the pandemic. They have kept our borders secure on the roads and in the airports. They have ensured our quarantine hotels are secure. They have made sure our community is safe.

The legislation we are debating is the result of the dedication and unrelenting efforts of the people who represent the best interests of our first responders. I must acknowledge that it was a few years ago that Police Union president Ian Leavers came to me about this idea. Since then, he and I have worked relentlessly on this proposal. The Palaszczuk government made it an election commitment to the Queensland Police Union. Today is the culmination of the efforts of Queensland Police Union. I pay tribute to Ian Leavers and the Queensland Police Union for their contribution to this legislation.

All government workers—all employees that are captured by this bill, including police officers—will now benefit from this advocacy. This is the end result of what can be achieved when workers have a strong union like that we see at the Queensland Police Union. Its strong leadership team, particularly Ian Leavers, Mick Barnes and Shayne Maxwell, should be justifiably proud of what it has been able to deliver for police and other frontline workers. I can honestly say that without Ian, Mick and Shayne this bill would never have been debated in this place.

We must never forget that the work that police officers, our emergency services volunteers, staff and officers, our firefighters, our paramedics, custodial and community corrections officers and staff do is challenging and confronting. It can be dangerous and it can be traumatising, and they are just like us—they can be impacted by that tragedy—and they are not immune to the trauma they deal with on a regular basis.

I also want to acknowledge the strong advocacy of other unions—that is, Alex Scott and Michael Thomas from the Together union; John Oliver from the United Firefighters Union; Adrian Stafford and Neal Francis from the Senior Officers Union; and all unions that have been representing workers about

this important legislation. This is about workers' rights and about making sure that those people who keep our community safe are afforded the best possible support in their time of need. They have fought the good fight to ensure that their members—those members who keep the community safe, who fight fires, who respond to road crashes, who keep correctional centres and communities secure—get the support they need. I want to quote the Together union, which acknowledged this important reform. It said—

This is a very important reform. We know that many of our members are exposed to traumatic events during the course of their work. This legislation will ensure that when our First Responders, our Correctional Officers, Child Safety Officers, SES staff, youth workers and those others included in the Legislation need support they get it, rather than being further traumatised by the process of asking for help.

This legislation will help our first responders get access to all of the care and support they need. This legislation will mean that police, firefighters, emergency service volunteers, officers and staff, custodial officers and community corrections staff will no longer need to prove in the first instance that their injury is work related. They will no longer have the added stress and trauma of needing to prove this before getting treatment. Now police and other first responders will be able to come forward and seek treatment early without needing to go through a lengthy determination process.

In addition, the government's watershed investment in policing will also deliver specialist staff who will be joining a QPS wellbeing centre to help the rehabilitation of recovering officers. Our election commitment was that there would be a minimum extra 10 injury management consultants to support the work of the Queensland Police Service in supporting its workforce. This means doubling the number of injury management officers and means police will get more assistance in a more timely manner when they need it most.

I know too that many of the agencies for which I have portfolio responsibility are doing more to support their workforce to ensure that their workforce gets the best possible support. These efforts will foster positive and supportive organisational cultures that focus on people and put wellbeing first and foremost as a priority. We must never forget that our emergency service workers—our first responders—work in some of the most dangerous environments and consistently place themselves between danger and our community. Our police do it; our firefighters do it; our emergency service volunteers, officers and staff do it; our custodial officers and community corrections officers do it; and our paramedics do it.

This bill recognises the selfless dedication of those who protect our community and this bill puts into practice the deep appreciation of all of us for the efforts of those who keep Queenslanders safe. They care for us, but we must also care for them. I must say that this bill is also unashamedly pro worker—that is, putting workers' supports and workers' protections first and foremost. That is a proud legacy of this Labor government and a proud legacy of Minister Grace's responsibility as the Minister for Industrial Relations. Workers for decades and generations to come will be grateful for her efforts and also the efforts of this government in protecting workers and putting workers first. I commend the bill to the House.