




Speech By  
**Rob Molhoek**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT**

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

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (4.55 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. As so many other members of this House have done today, I thank our first responders for the incredible work, commitment and sacrifice that so many have made, particularly over the past 12 to 18 months in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I note at the outset that this legislation particularly is focused on addressing those workers who are wrestling with the impact of PTSD. I note that there is still so much that we need to learn about this challenge. It comes in all shapes and forms. People react and respond very differently to the circumstances and pressures that come through their day-to-day work. Like so many others in the House have said, we support this legislation because it is so important to take care of our first responders.

I note that under the current workers compensation scheme the onus is on first responders to prove that their employment was a significant contributing factor in causing their psychological injury. However, I also note that under the current scheme about 80 per cent to 90 per cent of PTSD statutory WorkCover claims are accepted. This legislation essentially seeks to close that gap and to make compensation and support for individuals and families more accessible.

I note also the broad terms with regard to the definition of first responders that are covered under the bill. I think it is appropriate that police officers and police recruits, ambulance officers, child safety officers, corrective services staff, Youth Justice staff members, fire service officers and so many other first responders, including doctors and nurses and others who work in allied health areas, particularly when they are working within emergency, trauma, acute and critical care, should also be eligible to be considered under these presumptive conditions.

I reiterate the concerns raised earlier by the member for Surfers Paradise. The Newman government undertook significant reforms to workers compensation legislation. We also introduced presumptive legislation, or more inclusive legislation, in some categories because our genuine desire was to try to fix some of the inefficiencies in the system and improve access to help, remuneration and support while at the same time seeking to make the system more cost efficient.

With the House's indulgence, I would like to share a little story. About three years ago, a very good friend of mine experienced a significant workplace accident, resulting in significant back injury. It is not PTSD, but I share the example because of the journey. As the member for Surfers Paradise said, many workers go through the process of applying for workers compensation and then further compensation in the system only to find that by the end of the process, which can be incredibly long and frustrating, by the time the lawyers take their share, by the time they pay back the value of the workers compensation payments they received over that period of time while their case was being managed, and then by the time they pay for all the specialist appointments over time, there is actually very little left for them. That was the experience of my friend in this particular circumstance.

While I support the need to provide great workers compensation and support for those who are injured, whether psychologically or physically, I also believe that we need a system that works harder for victims or for those who have suffered or for those in need of financial support. What we are seeing in Queensland is a system that at times can be incredibly bureaucratic and gets incredibly bogged down with process. I can assure the House that last year during COVID it was even more challenging for my friend given that so many workplaces had people working from home or appointments were via videoconference, Zoom, Skype or Microsoft Teams. Then there were the challenges around some of those assessments being called into account because of the process undertaken in doing the report or assessment.

This is incredibly important legislation, as many in this House have said. I have enormous sympathy for our first responders, particularly our police and ambulance officers. As one of my friends said to me, 'There are so many things in this job that you cannot unsee.' The trauma that some of our first responders deal with must be absolutely horrific.

When visiting one of our health services recently I spoke with some of the staff in the emergency department. We were talking about some of the incidents that they have to deal with. There was one very recent accident that they shared a bit of story about. I said to the doctor I was chatting with, 'How do you unpack that? How do you deal with that when it gets to six o'clock in the evening or eight o'clock at night or the end of your shift or six o'clock in the morning when you have been on night shift? How do you unpack that when you get home and put it to one side and get back to some normalcy?' It is important that we have good systems in place in our health services and indeed in all of our frontline services to support staff.

In the short time that I was the assistant minister for child safety I had the pleasure and privilege of visiting many of our child safety service centres. The frontline responders in that space do an incredible job and do us proud under very challenging circumstances. It is easy for us to gloss over the fact that the work they do might, at one level, seem very routine, but I can assure the House that when a child is removed from its family or where a child safety officer or the police are called in to deal with a particularly traumatic situation where children are needing to be removed there is nothing routine, simple or unemotional about the process. These people are dealing with very challenging, emotional and highly charged situations. It is important that we have a system that provides a level of comfort and assurance to our first responders so that when they need the help and support of the government through the government's workers compensation insurer it is there.

I am sure that there are many who would probably wish that this sort of legislation was in place 10, 20 or 30 years ago. A very good friend of mine, a former police officer, has on occasions shared some fairly harrowing stories over a glass of red and dinner. I absolutely admire the work of our police. I do not believe that Queenslanders can fully understand or appreciate the challenges that many of them face and the trauma that they have to deal with. This friend of mine was under fire in a siege and subsequently received awards for bravery, albeit some 20 years late. This friend spent a number of years as part of the paedophilia and trafficking ring investigative teams in Queensland back in the dark eighties.

Like so many in this House, I am pleased to speak in support of this legislation. I note there are some shortcomings with it and some concerns around the cost of premiums. It is beholden on us as a government and as a parliament to ensure that we provide rigour and review through our committee structure and departments and ensure that while we provide better service Queenslanders also get great value for money.