




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 12 May 2021

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

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (11.18 am): I rise to make a contribution in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020, reintroduced into the Legislative Assembly on 26 November 2020 following the dissolution of the previous parliament. I am proud to stand in this chamber as a member of the Palaszczuk Labor government because we on this side of the House support those who support our community, and that is exactly what this bill does. The bill before us will give first responders and eligible employees of first responder agencies suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder easier, timelier access to necessary support and compensation by reversing the onus of proof and deeming their injury to be work related while leaving open the opportunity for evidence based rebuttal to dispute their claim.

Mr BLEIJIE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I understand that Minister Grace was kicked out of the chamber for an hour.

Mr SPEAKER: No. In what may have been a lapse of judgement on my part, I only asked the members for McConnel and Warrego to leave until the end of question time.

Mr BLEIJIE: How unfortunate, but that is okay.

Ms Grace: I take offence at that!

Mr SPEAKER: The member has taken offence at that. Will you withdraw?

Mr BLEIJIE: I withdraw!

Mrs D'ATH: This new legislation will complement existing workers compensation laws and entitlements and provide a different pathway for work related claims. We know that being a frontline responder is tough sometimes. They are the first trained people with skills to assist people in need who arrive on the scene to help their fellow Queenslanders. They are the Queenslanders who roll up their sleeves in times of need and get on with the job regardless of the situation. They are the people who put their own lives on the line to save others.

This new legislation will apply to defined first responders and other eligible employees who are prescribed in the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Regulation 2014. These roles include traditional first responders who respond to life-threatening or otherwise traumatic incidents where time may be critical to prevent actual or potential death or injury to persons or to prevent or minimise damage to property or the environment. I am advised that the occupations or professions which are captured are: police officers; ambulance officers and paramedics; child protection officers; corrective services officers; firefighters, including volunteers and the rural fire brigade; State Emergency Service members; doctors and nurses working in certain areas such as emergency and trauma care and acute care; authorised officers within Child Safety and Youth Justice staff; local government; private sector workers performing the same role as paramedics working in the not-for-profit sector or in the Mines Rescue

teams; and eligible employees who work for departments if they perform a role which exposes them to repeated or extreme details of traumatic incidents. As the House can see, this bill will support an array of first responders right across the spectrum.

The legislation before us today will mean that first responders who are struggling to cope with PTSD, a serious mental health condition, will not have to show that their injury is work related. The injury will be presumed to be work related unless an employer is able to rebut the presumption by showing that the worker's PTSD is not caused by their job. This is a positive step forward in supporting our frontline workers and it is a prime example of how the Palaszczuk government is continuing to back our frontline workers. This will also build on our legacy of reform legislation to support workers, including one of the first bills we introduced in 2015 to right the wrong made by the LNP government which saw us return workers' common-law rights. I read *Hansard* with interest when the shadow minister for industrial relations said yesterday—

The minister just said that Queensland has the best workers compensation scheme in Australia. The only reason the minister can make that claim is because she inherited the best workers compensation scheme in Australia.

What an absolute joke of a statement by the shadow minister for industrial relations—the person who was charged with industrial relations matters in the Newman LNP government. The member for Kawana should know that making false statements to this House is against the rules and I submit that the statement that we inherited the best workers compensation scheme from the LNP is completely misleading and call on the member to correct the record, because the member for Kawana has absolutely no credibility when it comes to industrial relations matters in Queensland.

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Mrs D'ATH: I will take that interjection. It is not a stupid point. It was those opposite—

Mrs Frecklington: I said 'student politics'.

Mrs D'ATH: Okay; I will correct the record: 'student politics'. Guess what? Those Queenslanders who were affected by those changes around workers compensation and the common law did not feel that way. They did not think that this was a trivial matter when those changes were made. It is the Palaszczuk Labor government which restored frontline services, including the hiring of more frontline responders to support Queenslanders.

As Minister for Health and Ambulance Services I am so proud of the work our frontline responders do on a daily basis right across Queensland. Whether you are in Coolangatta, Brisbane, Townsville, Cairns or out west in Longreach, Mount Isa or Birdsville, there is always a first responder ready, willing and able to come to your rescue and provide assistance.

I have met a number of paramedics and ambulance officers since becoming minister and I heard firsthand their experiences when they have dealt with incidents in Queensland. They are the ones who attend shocking car accidents and have to work in tough mental and physical conditions to cut people out of the wreckage, provide medical assistance and do their very best to get the person to a hospital or further medical assistance. This is not an easy job. I have witnessed the aftermath of a fatal car crash personally. I did not realise at the time the profound impact it had on me until I went into shock the next day. I can still remember it like it happened yesterday, and that was over two years ago.

The support people get, particularly our first responders, is critical to them managing their exposure to traumatic incidents. Not only is this bill important; we also need to ensure that our first responders are getting support early and are well informed of what support is available before they end up with post-traumatic stress disorder. I could only imagine how tough it is for our first responders to do what they do, sometimes multiple times a day, day in and day out 365 days a year, and for that I say thank you.

I have recently returned from Central West Queensland where I met a number of first responders serving in regional Queensland. These include Longreach paramedics Erin, Frank and Lauren; Barcaldine paramedic John; and Aramac paramedics Dan and Gary—all of whom work in challenging environments and have to respond to an array of calls each week across an extremely vast geographical location. I heard firsthand the challenges that regional Queensland poses on our first responders. This includes driving over four hours in one direction to attend a tragic incident where the paramedic had to not only attend to the patient who had been in the crash but then stabilise them and return them to the nearest hospital, another four-hour drive away.

In a recent visit to Thursday Island with the member for Cook I sat down for a chat with the hardworking paramedics on Thursday Island. They described how on any given week they are in and out of helicopters travelling vast distances to administer health care. This could include flying to a ship off the coast or to a remote island to attend to the sick or injured person. They would then assess the patient, stabilise them and transport them to the nearest healthcare facility—all while administering a

high level of healthcare support along the journey. They are confronted with difficult and challenging situations each and every day in different environments and settings, and for that we thank them. These are just some examples of many that occur each and every day across the state by our hardworking Queensland Ambulance Service staff, doctors, nurses—our first responders—who go above and beyond to ensure that Queenslanders have access to high-quality health care.

Police officers leave their homes every day not knowing what they are walking into. When they go to knock on that door when they attend an incident, they do not know what they are going to be faced with. They put their lives on the line to keep us safe, and we say thank you. The legislation before the House will further support our first responders and I wholeheartedly commend the bill to the House.