




Speech By
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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2)

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 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (4.48 pm): In rising to speak to these appropriation bills, I start by saying we were expecting these bills last year. It seems like the government is even more relaxed this year about getting its house in order. The Queensland Greens will be supporting these bills because we believe it is the government's job to fund services for everyday people.

The first appropriation of \$1.795 million for the Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary Service relates to the costs of running the 2020 state election funding, funding to relieve service delivery pressures and replacing the library management system. Given the unforeseen challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to fund our public institutions to do their work, the Queensland Greens fully support this.

Appropriation Bill (No. 2) seeks to rubberstamp some unforeseen expenditure across six departments, adding up to \$447 million. Nearly 90 per cent of that expenditure arose from the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. Given the government's emphasis on law and order and at times overpolicing, I am not surprised to see these overspends, but \$450 million is a lot of money. The vote on this bill is simply a formality and \$450 million is small in the context of a state budget. We are spending five hours debating this instead of some of the biggest issues facing our state.

The issue that really jumps out to me is why is there political will to move this money around at the stroke of a pen with half a day's debate when we are constantly told we do not have enough money to properly fund our public services? There is no doubt, for example, that Queensland is in a housing crisis. This is well documented. After the uncertainty of COVID-19, it has quickly become clear that house prices in Queensland are soaring, as are rents. Inequality and existing social pressures have deepened. The number of applications on the social housing waiting list is unacceptably high. I have come across far too many Queenslanders who are in a desperate housing situation or facing increasing household debt.

The Queensland Audit Office is doing a very welcome audit into the delivery of social housing in Queensland. We are hoping this audit will shine a light on all of the questions begging to be answered about the government's social housing strategy. The government states it will build 3,600 new social homes over four years with the \$40 million it intends to make from the dividends from the Housing Investment Fund. This in turn is meant to be funded from the overinflated transfer of the titles office. We have zero details about how this fund will work or whether this return is tracking to be delivered.

Let us contrast those commitments with the amount being moved around in this bill—this \$450 million is more than 10 times the yearly dividend from the Housing Investment Fund of just \$40 million. By the government's own logic, we could fund 10 times the amount of social homes, about 9,000 a year—that is 36,000 over the forward estimates. This will go a long way to bringing down the

social housing waiting list in a meaningful way, with nearly 50,000 people who are waiting on that list. This is a government with the political will to move money around on overspends for out-of-home care and the justice system. Why not move around the same amount of money to fix the housing crisis?

Let us look at public education. Public education should be free but Queensland families are paying millions of dollars every year in school service fees and extra costs for things like uniforms, books and excursions. We have some of the most underfunded state schools in the country, and it is parents, teachers and students who pay the cost. Over the last decade or so state funding per public school student has decreased by \$128, while funding for private and Catholic schools has increased by \$220 and \$246 per student respectively. While we have private schools like Citipointe Christian College taking huge amounts of government funding to discriminate against trans and queer kids, we have a problem.

Queensland Labor and the federal LNP are in lock-step in maintaining this unequal education funding. It is common sense that everyone in Australia should be able to access an excellent education regardless of where they live or their background, but we need to talk about fully funding our public education system. The Greens have been talking about fully funding our state schools to bring Queensland's share of the needs based schooling resources standard to the required 80 per cent. I have been consistently talking about a plan for this since being elected, and it is clear the government has no plan. We are currently at 69.2 per cent of the SRS, with a goal to get to 75 per cent by 2032. That would still leave us at only 95 per cent funded state schools, with private and Catholic schools well in excess of 100 per cent. If we can move money around so easily, let us move some money around for public education. Why does this parliament have no political will to fund our public education system but we have the political will to do these appropriations?

Let us look at health. The state of our health system is something we have been talking about for a while. My office has been hearing from healthcare workers on the front line raising the alarm about our public health system. We have been hearing from paramedics who said that with population growth there has been no increase in funding. Mental health, in particular, remains severely underfunded. A nurse wrote to us about the lack of hospital capacity, saying that they and their colleagues are facing things like 'ambulance ramping ... no beds to offload patients into, patients that require monitoring are being offloaded early which is unsafe'. An emergency department admin staff said, 'I've worked in ED for 10 years and while the number of patients has doubled over that time, there has been no expanding of the space. There is always a delayed response to increases in patient numbers.' A public allied health worker said that over the COVID-19 crisis, 'We have been asked to do even more with even less, while managing the stress of COVID-19.'

Reporting this year has quoted GPs saying ambulances were pulling into their GP clinics to have patients assessed because hospitals were overwhelmed. Organisations like the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union and the Australian Medication Association Queensland have been wondering how the system will cope. We still do not have an update on when elective surgeries will pick back up.

Already this year we have seen acute workforce shortages across the spectrum of Queensland Health services from general practice to hospitals to residential aged care. Workers are stressed and exhausted. The Nurses and Midwives' Union have been calling for clinical staff to get an allowance to recognise the immense stress that the staff have been put under while keeping us safe. This is something I urge the government to pick up. The truth is our social support systems cannot cope if we do not properly fund them. Just as this government seems comfortable in moving around \$450 million to fix up its accounting, we want to see a proper debate about what it would take to properly fund our housing, health and education systems.

I also wanted to comment on the discussion today about Queensland's employment rates. We still have one of the lowest rates of employment in the country. We also have a relatively high rate of underemployment—seven per cent. This is people who do not have enough hours to get the money they need to pay their rent, to pay their bills, to pay for transport costs, to pay for their school lunches for their kids. In my electorate we are seeing small businesses who are struggling, who are closing their doors, who are putting off staff. In the absence of substantial support for small businesses or federal support in the form of doubling supports like JobSeeker, what is our community going to do? Every per cent of unemployment or underemployment is thousands of families who are struggling. As we have heard today from so many people, the pandemic is not yet over and people do not have the support they need.