




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (6.46 pm): The fact that we are debating two such important bills in cognate, the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Public Sector Bill, is pretty incredible in the context of integrity. This government does not want either of these bills to be submitted to proper scrutiny—that is obvious here in this chamber—and so are seeking to rush through debate in cognate. We know this government does not care about consultation. They do not care about scrutiny. They are really not interested in letting the sunshine in. A cognate debate is just another example of this, along with things like guillotining debate, hiding information behind commercial-in-confidence, rushed committee reviews and shielding the operations of the Olympics Committee from right to information. The integrity bill barely touches the scourge of lobbying in this state and it fails to close the revolving door between parliament and lobbying firms. It is shameful—but that is Queensland Labor.

My colleague the member for Maiwar has covered the integrity bill in some detail, so I will turn to the Public Sector Bill. This bill makes some minor improvements to strengthen our public sector and support workers, but it does not go far enough and it includes some pretty bewildering omissions of the most basic reforms that are being called for by Queenslanders and submitters to the bill. The Greens will be supporting the Public Sector Bill, but we will be moving amendments to support teachers and nurses who are fighting the casualisation of jobs in our schools and hospitals to create a clearer pathway for workers to get secure permanent employment. I would like to table these amendments now.

Tabled paper: Public Sector Bill 2022, amendments to be moved by Dr Amy MacMahon MP, explanatory notes and statement of compatibility with human rights to Dr Amy MacMahon's amendments incorporated [1992](#).

Right now thousands of teachers and healthcare workers do not even know where or if they will have a job after Christmas. The Labor government is stringing along workers in schools and hospitals with casual work and temporary contracts. The Queensland Teachers' Union and the Nurses and Midwives' Union have been fighting for job security for our incredibly hardworking teachers and nurses and their submissions flagged the need for measures to help workers get the secure permanent positions that they deserve.

Our amendments will mean that any public sector worker who has been in a casual or temporary position for more than one year will be offered permanency if the role is to be ongoing. This will provide much needed job security for our nurses and teachers and will mean a more stable and effective public sector. Right now the Labor government's practice of keeping staff on temporary or casual contracts is causing public schools and hospital workers to leave the profession early or leave entirely. This year we have seen the teaching and nursing shortage worsen and our hospitals and schools are feeling the crunch and teachers and nurses are crying out for support. We desperately need to improve job security and working conditions in the public sector or patient and student outcomes will continue to worsen.

In August the Nurses and Midwives' Union warned that nurses would be leaving Queensland to go interstate if Queensland did not match initiatives that are being taken by other states to bolster healthcare worker numbers and improve their working conditions. Why would they not leave Queensland? When teachers and nurses are strung along with temporary and casual contracts, they struggle to get things like home loans or car loans. They cannot settle down and build a community. They cannot build lasting professional relationships with colleagues. They cannot live with the security and peace of mind that our school and hospital workers deserve.

Ensuring our public sector workers have permanent work is about protecting the interests of workers everywhere. A well-funded, efficient and compassionate public sector provides long-term opportunities and signals to the private sector that they need to do the same or risk losing talent. The Human Rights Commission says that the gender pay gap is linked to the lack of permanency in professions with a high representation of women such as health care and teaching. The Bridgman report recommends that, by default, ongoing work should be filled by permanent employees.

When schools and hospitals do not have a stable and permanent workforce their effectiveness suffers. It is hard to administer and organise large workplaces such as hospitals, schools and other public sector institutions without knowing who will be on the books in six months time or when talent is continuously leaving the Queensland public sector for greener pastures. Queensland depends on nurses, teachers and other public sector workers and we should not undervalue them but this government does. By ignoring workers and ignoring unions, the government is ignoring the needs of Queenslanders.

I want to flag one of the key things this government could do to support public sector workers—that is, to pay them fairly. In July I asked the Minister for Industrial Relations what the government would do if inflation continued to rise. At that point the minister told me that, in terms of inflation, seven per cent is the absolute high end. Inflation hit 7.9 per cent in the September quarter. I repeat: 7.9 per cent. Wages for teachers, nurses, midwives and other public servants is effectively going backwards.

This week the Electrical Trades Union have been picketing the minister's office, demanding that they come to the negotiating table for a fair wage increase. They are saying, 'The Queensland government is ripping off its own workers. Start bargaining now.'

The Greens will also be moving to amend another glaring failure of this bill, which is the government's failure to include LGBTIQ+ people in its diversity target groups. A lack of diversity and inclusivity in the public sector is inherently detrimental to the ability of public entities to perform their obligations to the public. The public sector cannot represent and serve the needs of the community if it is not reflective of the diversity within the community, yet this government seems to say that there is no evidence that LGBTIQ+ people face discrimination or barriers within the public sector. Workers, unions and the Greens disagree. In their submission the Queensland Teachers' Union included the following—

The QTU maintains that the disadvantage experienced by members of the LGBTIQ+ community warrants their inclusion as a fifth diversity target group. We note the assertion made at the consultation meetings that there is "no evidence base to suggest that other groups require a targeted response", but reject it.

The QTU also references workforce data and academic research highlighting the disadvantages LGBTIQ+ people face in the workforce and their barriers to employment and career progression. In their submission, the QTU includes this account of discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ people in the public sector—

I had applied for a job as a principal and won the position. As soon as my sexuality was divulged, the college took that position away from me. There were community discussions held without me being present, and I was compared to being a paedophile.

The QTU appropriately highlights that teachers are uniquely privileged and trusted with the mentoring of young people. It is important to the development of all young people that the identities and experiences of their mentors correlate to their own. That is true not only for young LGBTIQ+ people but also for children and young people who are disabled, First Nations or from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The Australian Services Union, the Nurses and Midwives' Union and the Queensland Council of Unions all agree that this bill inappropriately excludes LGBTIQ+ people from its measures to improve diversity and inclusion in the public sector. The reality is that Queensland is composed of a myriad of First Nations and migrant peoples with different abilities, genders, languages and experiences. It is essential that our public sector is representative of the people it serves for it to operate effectively and efficiently and with compassion and fairness.

The bill also talks about reframing the state's relationship with First Nations people and includes some laudable measures including recognising and honouring Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people as the first peoples of Queensland, recognising the right to self-determination, engaging in truth telling, promoting cultural safety, ensuring First Nations people are represented in leadership

and ensuring public entities work in partnership with First Nations people. These are great measures, but this bill uses the term 'responsibility' incredibly generously because, immediately following the provisions containing these so-called responsibilities, the bill states that none of the responsibilities need to be adhered to nor is there any legal consequence or course of action if they are not adhered to.

As everyone in this chamber would know, it is the strength of First Nations people and their resistance to colonisation and violence, their resilience of culture and their ability to stand up against subjugation and assimilation that are the big reasons we have seen progress for First Nations rights and conditions in recent decades. However, as everyone here would know, the impact of colonisation, violence and racism continues. If you are a First Nations person in Queensland then you are likely to face worse health and economic outcomes, you are more likely to face discrimination, you are more likely to live in poverty and you are more likely to go to prison. We hear from communities on the ground that these are the things that they want action on: implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, stopping land clearing and theft in places such as Deebing Creek and stamping out racism in the Queensland police force.

(Time expired)