




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Record of Proceedings, 31 March 2022

PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (EXTENSION OF EXPIRING PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (4.15 pm): I rise to speak on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill, a bill that the public commonly refer to as the emergency powers bill. COVID is very real. Since the pandemic began, more than 765,000 Queenslanders have been diagnosed with it. More than 7,000 people have been diagnosed with it in the last 24 hours. Currently, there are 362 individuals in hospital with COVID—16 of those in ICU. Sadly, 737 Queenslanders have succumbed to COVID. I extend my sympathies to those Queenslanders who have lost loved ones. My heart also goes out to those who have lost their livelihoods and lost their jobs, but I will come back to that in some detail shortly.

COVID is very real. If you have not had it, chances are you will get it. The world, Australia and Queensland are different places to what they were when we first put in place these emergency provisions. Queensland is a different place from when we debated an extension to these laws back in August last year. For starters, significantly more than 90 per cent of eligible Queenslanders have been double vaccinated. I and the LNP support vaccination. We support, and have supported and always will support, the AHPPC vaccination advice, particularly as it pertains to the health, aged-care and disability sectors.

As such, Queenslanders are now living with COVID, albeit with ongoing challenges. It is here that I want to acknowledge our amazing frontline health professionals who have done an outstanding job over the past two years in facing this head on. I also want to acknowledge our amazing teachers and students who have had one of the most disjointed, frustrating and testing starts to any school year.

The time has come to make living with COVID easier for all. The restrictions on our shows, the lifeblood of our communities in places like Maleny and Woodford, need to end now. As others have said, the ridiculous situation where you can host a market on a Thursday at the showground but not hold a show on a Friday does not make sense. The restrictions on our hospitality small business owners need to end now.

Many of the provisions in this bill need to end. Before those opposite start going on and suggesting that what I am saying is crazy, what I am actually saying is not inconsistent with what the newly minted South Australian Labor government has just announced, and that is that vaccine mandates will end effectively at midnight in the education and passenger transport sectors. I note a media article to that effect. Labor governments in other jurisdictions are taking sensible steps to end unnecessary mandates.

However, some of the provisions in this bill do need to stay—for example, mask wearing in aged-care facilities—which is why we in the LNP are moving some very sensible amendments. These amendments bring transparency. For starters, we will reduce the extension from 31 October 2022 to 31 May 2022. We are giving the government two months to chart a path out of this, to remove those unnecessary restrictions and to find other ways to legislate those aspects that need to stay. Secondly,

we had hoped to move an amendment to compel the government and the Chief Health Officer to release the expert health advice they use to prepare their public health directives. Queenslanders are fed up with the secrecy. Release the advice. Unfortunately, as the government has already voted once against these amendments, we are not able to put that again.

Thirdly, we seek to establish a parliamentary committee to oversee Queensland's ongoing response to COVID. Such a bipartisan approach mirrors similar oversight in other Australian and international jurisdictions. It would increase transparency around the health advice. It would hold hearings with the Chief Health Officer. It would consider the AHPPC advice recommended by the Commonwealth government. It would deliberate on appropriate quarantine requirements for international arrivals, especially should a new strain surface. It would provide recommendations to government on what, if any, ongoing restrictions should be maintained.

These amendments are considered, these amendments are responsible, these amendments are sensible, these amendments are transparent. If the Palaszczuk Labor government, however, does not support these amendments, I will not support this legislation. I repeat: if these amendments are not supported by the Palaszczuk Labor government, I will vote against this bill.

I spoke earlier about the loss of jobs and of livelihoods. I have addressed this in the House on a number of occasions already. Let me today read into *Hansard* letters I have received that were directed to the Premier from the Maleny and Montville chambers of commerce. These are not what the government brands as 'crazies' or 'anti-vaxxers'; these are small business owners representing their fellow small business owners. The first is from the Maleny Commerce president, Mr Spencer Shaw. He wrote—

The Maleny Chamber of Commerce supports the call for the Queensland State Government to immediately remove their Vaccine Mandate for the hospitality industry. Maleny and the Blackall Range is well known for its cafes, restaurants, winery's, micro-breweries, bars and hotels. These businesses are all small business operated and provide the majority of employment in our community.

For two years our business community has survived and adapted as best they can to the varying restrictions imposed by mandates to assist with the prevention and management of the spread and impacts of the Covid19 virus. However as we move into the phase of management phase where Covid19 is now endemic within the population and vaccinations are beyond 90% of the Queensland population, it is time to repeal the mandates that place an undue economic, legal and social burden upon the small businesses that are the backbone of our tourism based economy.

He concluded—

After two years of bearing the burden of adapting and surviving Covid 19 Mandates, our hospitality businesses and our wider business community need hope that these restrictions are coming to an end, and we are returning to a degree of positivity and certainty. We need this so that our businesses and community are given back the ability to survive and prosper.

The second letter is from Shiralee Cooper, President of the Montville Chamber of Commerce. She wrote—

The Montville Chamber of Commerce supports the call for the Queensland State Government to expedite the removal of the Vaccine Mandate on the hospitality industry.

Hospitality has been one of the areas most exposed to the impact of Covid 19. The vaccine mandate has placed a ... unsustainable burden upon hospitality.

Initially they have been forced to stand down unvaccinated employees. This has been terribly distressing for many business owners. Some have long term staff who are like members of their family and they have been forced by the State Government's regulations to sack these unvaccinated staff. (Unfortunately many employees blame the business owner for enforcing the State Government's mandate.)

She went on—

The inconsistency of the mandate policy causes confusion and requires staff to constantly explain the rules to customers. Some customers have reacted angrily to being excluded whilst others have called in the police if a business is perceived to have turned a blind eye. Our hospitality staff have had to bear the brunt of this fractious situation. The goodwill of many establishments has been severely undermined by having to impose the State Government's Vaccine Mandate.

She concluded—

We ask that the government urgently review this impost on small business and the community. We ask that the State Government seek as a matter of urgency, a review of the health advice which led to the establishment of the mandates within the hospitality industry. Small business need support!

In the interests of time, I table both of those letters.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 22 March 2022, from the President Maleny Commerce, Maleny & District Chamber of Commerce & Industry Inc., Mr Spencer Shaw, to the Premier and Minister for the Olympics, Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk, titled 'Covid mandate and impacts on Maleny Business Community' [485](#).

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 22 March 2022, from the President, Montville Chamber of Commerce Inc., Ms Shiralee Cooper, to the Premier and Minister for the Olympics, Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk, regarding the COVID mandate [486](#).

The Palaszczuk Labor government stopped listening to Queenslanders long ago. They stopped listening to business owners like Spencer, Shiralee and Andrew Grant in the outdoor education sector. They have stopped listening to Queenslanders. We in the LNP will not.