




Speech By
Corrine McMillan

MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

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

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (5.08 pm): I rise to support the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022. As chair of the Community Support and Services Committee, our task was to consider the policy to be achieved by the legislation and the application of fundamental legislative principles—that is, to consider whether the bill has sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals and to the institution of parliament. The committee also examined the bill for compatibility with human rights in accordance with the Human Rights Act 2019.

Tragically, since the emergence of the virus in Australia in 2020, 718 Queenslanders have lost their lives to COVID. In New South Wales 2,057 and in Victoria 2,727 people have lost their lives to COVID. I note the comments of Mr Matt Dunn of the Queensland Law Society at the public hearing to the bill who referenced that good governance is about finding a balance. Mr Dunn stated—

There is liberty—the opportunity to not be deprived of your freedom—and, at the same time, there is a public health imperative and a public health outcome that needs to be achieved.

Ultimately and importantly, good governance must be about preventing lives being lost and ensuring at the forefront of decision-making is the health of all Queenslanders—the disabled, the aged, our First Nations peoples and other vulnerable Queenslanders. We all know many of those vulnerable Queenslanders. For many Queenslanders who consider themselves privileged, we understand the responsibility and the small sacrifices that come with this privilege.

The Queensland government, by establishing the COVID-19 legislative measures in 2020 and by continuing to govern with a careful consideration for a balance of freedoms and restrictions, brought the Queensland community out of the first wave of the pandemic without extensive loss of life or long periods of lockdown. This approach has been the envy of other eastern states of Australia and has been admired by the rest of the western world. Whilst there have been challenges for Queensland businesses, they have not endured the extent of economic hardship that has been experienced by businesses in New South Wales and Victoria during their long periods of lockdown, restricted movement and the inability to work as a result of high infection rates.

Queensland's economy has outperformed the rest of Australia. The state's domestic economy is 6.3 per cent larger than it was in March 2020, while Australia's GDP is only 3.7 per cent larger. Since the emergence of the virus, Queensland has added more than 150,000 jobs, which is more than the number of additional jobs created in New South Wales and Victoria combined. Queensland's timely and targeted health response has limited the impact of the virus on the state's fiscal position. In the 2021-22 financial year, the Queensland government is forecasting a net operating deficit of \$1.5 billion, relative to deficits of nearly \$20 billion in both New South Wales and Victoria.

The spread of the COVID-19 virus remains unpredictable. As at 28 March 2022, Queensland has 62,299 active cases, with New South Wales at 253,307 cases and Victoria at 56,997 cases. Whilst the Omicron variant is currently the dominant strain, new variants of COVID-19, such as the BA.2 subvariant, continue to emerge. On 24 March 2022, New South Wales recorded 24,803 new cases—the majority of which were the BA.2 subvariant of COVID-19.

Many Queenslanders have enjoyed a lifting of restrictions of late, and I note that the majority of the associated COVID-19 legislative measures are due to expire on 30 April 2022 and these will not be extended by this bill, allowing a return to normal operations. At the same time, the Queensland government recognises that a legislative framework of essential public health measures must continue. Whilst many are focused on the public health restrictions imposed by the state government, it is worth acknowledging that the federal government has a role to play in the continuation of vaccine mandates. This is through both the collective decisions of National Cabinet as well as the requirements they have imposed unilaterally with respect to Australians wishing to undertake international travel.

Medicine is not an exact science, as we know. We must remain agile and responsive to the virus to protect our Queensland community—for this is good governance. On behalf of the committee, I thank the many thousands of individuals and organisations which took the time out of their busy schedules to make written submissions on the bill. Their perspectives and feedback are essential to the decision-making processes of good government. I also thank our Parliamentary Service staff and the Department of Health for their advice during the drafting of the report. As chair of the committee, I commend this bill to the House.