




Speech By
Corrine McMillan

MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

Record of Proceedings, 26 October 2022

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (COVID-19 MANAGEMENT)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (11.45 am): I rise to speak on the Public Health and Other Legislation (COVID-19 Management) Amendment Bill 2022. Queenslanders are known for their resilience and strength when the unpredictable happens. The past 2½ years have certainly proven this as we all navigated the unknown that was the COVID-19 pandemic. While we have returned to what is the new normal, there will always be that sense of the unknown. We do not know what ongoing risk or challenges COVID-19 will bring which is why I am supporting the Public Health and Other Legislation (COVID-19 Management) Amendment Bill.

The bill is an important step in Queensland's path out from the midst of the pandemic, whilst still ensuring there are safeguards in place should we see a spike in cases or an emergence of another strain of COVID-19. The transition from emergency to non-emergency work is vital to continue Queensland's booming economy. Just yesterday CommSec announced that the Queensland economy was the best performing in all of mainland Australia. This is all thanks to the precautionary steps taken by the Palaszczuk government, in particular the Premier and the Treasurer and Minister for Trade and Investment. The steps that we took through our unite and recover plan have ensured Queensland is in the best position economically—something which is the envy of other states.

Through the COVID-19 legislative measures that were introduced by the Queensland government in 2020, we saw Queensland come out of the first major wave of the pandemic with minimal loss of lives or extended lockdowns. While the measures within the amendment bill will not be as restrictive as those introduced in 2020, they will allow the Chief Health Officer to act accordingly and appropriately. I would like to draw the attention of the House to a couple of the main points within this amendment bill, in particular part 5A, 'Public health directions for COVID-19'.

The amendments to the bill will no longer allow the Chief Health Officer to restrict access to vulnerable settings, like aged-care facilities. The power to restrict visitors to these facilities was an extreme but necessary measure that was taken during the emergency phase of the pandemic when the risks were severe and had to be managed. We are fortunate, through the incredible guidance and leadership of the Premier and the Chief Health Officer, to be in the position that it is not considered necessary or appropriate for the Chief Health Officer to have a broad power to restrict visitors to vulnerable settings.

During the pandemic, Queensland was blessed to have two incredible and knowledgeable chief health officers in both Dr Jeannette Young and Dr John Gerrard. The knowledge and experience of the medical field that a Chief Health Officer has is exactly why they are well placed to make decisions in a situation like a COVID-19 pandemic, where the data is continually changing and new medical and clinical information is constantly coming to light.

The bill will provide the Chief Health Officer with limited but targeted powers to manage any ongoing risks of COVID-19. The narrowing of the powers reduces the potential impacts on individuals and will minimise any limitations on human rights. The test in which the Chief Health Officer may assess

and issue a public health direction will be strengthened. The public health order may only be issued if it is reasonably necessary to prevent or respond to a serious risk to the health system or the community as a result of COVID-19 or give effect to decisions of National Cabinet or advice from a COVID-19 advisory body.

The Public Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will not disapply any provisions of the Human Rights Act. This will mean that any administrative decisions made by a public entity which includes the Chief Health Officer under a direction may be found unlawful if incompatible with human rights.

While we all acknowledge that the future is uncertain, we must continue to remain aware of, agile and responsive to the virus and continue to protect our fellow Queenslanders and the Queensland community. This is what is expected of a good government, and this is what only a Labor government will do. I commend this bill to the House.