




Speech By  
**Jennifer Howard**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2022

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

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (12.50 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022. I do so because it worked and it is continuing to work. This bill extends the provisions required to support Queensland's public health response to COVID-19. Queensland's response to the pandemic has been outstanding. Our careful, strategic approach has prioritised the health of Queenslanders and ensured our hospitals have not been overwhelmed.

When I hear the member for Hill's speech and when I hear some of the speeches from those opposite, it would seem that the measures we have introduced to protect Queenslanders are part of some evil scheme. That is far from the case. Like many people in this House, I am a parent. Often, we do have to make decisions that are in the best interests of our children because that is our responsibility. As members of parliament, it is our responsibility to take care of the broader community, to take care of everyone. It does not make everyone happy but leadership is our job.

We did not call 64 times for the borders to be opened—you can imagine what a disaster that would have been. What we did do was successfully contain and eliminate the spread of COVID-19 when no vaccine was available. This saved thousands of people from severe disease and death. Once the majority of us were vaccinated, we steadily removed restrictions and learnt to live with the virus, while carefully managing the risks to protect the more vulnerable members of our community.

We have had many freedoms throughout the past few years. There have been restrictions. I think I heard the Minister for Small Business say that we had something like 21 days of lockdown. I have a son who lives in Melbourne, the most locked down city in the world. Some 262 days of his life as a young student were lost. Those statistics speak for themselves.

**Ms Boyd** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Krause): Order! Member for Pine Rivers, you are under a warning. You can leave the chamber for one hour under standing order 253A.

*Whereupon the honourable member for Pine Rivers withdrew from the chamber at 12.52 pm.*

**Ms HOWARD:** Over the past two years, Queensland has dodged the worst of this pandemic. This is thanks to the hard work and leadership of our Premier; the former and current chief health officers, Dr Jeannette Young and Dr John Gerard; the leadership team of our government; and the former and current health ministers, Steven Miles and Yvette D'Ath. We owe a massive debt to all of the hardworking health and emergency workers across the state who have sacrificed so much during the pandemic to keep us safe.

I acknowledge the role that all Queenslanders have played in the positive outcomes we have had. In particular, I acknowledge my constituents in Ipswich. I know that when the pandemic first hit I got on the phone, like many of us, to talk to the vulnerable people in our community. I was overwhelmed by the way that everybody immediately knew what to do. They were not whining or complaining about any of the deprivation of liberties; they just got on with it. They were not worried about themselves; they

were talking about their 94-year-old neighbour or their family member with a disability. It was all about the greater community. It was about doing the right thing for the betterment of everyone. I do want to thank all of those people.

I want to thank all of our schools and the students at our schools. There have been sacrifices. People will never get that time back again, particularly our students at university, as well as at our high schools and even in primary schools. Those children had to learn to work from home. It was a big burden on families—parents and children. I want to give a shout-out to them and acknowledge what they have been through.

This bill is essential to our state's successful pandemic response. If it were not for this bill, the Chief Health Officer would not be able to issue directions such as mask wearing in high-risk settings, requiring people to isolate after contracting COVID or issuing other public health measures to minimise COVID transmission. While the Omicron wave has certainly impacted our state's hospitals and tragically taken over 700 Queenslanders' lives, the measures put in place by the Chief Health Officer in the lead-up to the Omicron wave and during its peak have most likely contributed to Queensland seeing far fewer deaths and hospitalisations than anticipated.

I was interested to read, by way of comparison, of the experience of South Carolina in the US which has a similar population to the state of Queensland. It has recorded about 3,000 deaths since 1 January this year. That is not to discount the tragedy of the more than 700 deaths we have seen here in Queensland. They lost their lives during the Omicron wave. I cannot imagine what their family and friends are going through. Every single one of those people is sadly missed by their family and friends but, when you look at the statistics, you realise just how many lives we have saved from this terrible disease. This is due to our world-leading public health response, including our government's strong campaign to vaccinate all Queenslanders—something that has undoubtedly saved many lives.

Here in Queensland, 78½ per cent of our state's total population—counting all ages—has received at least two doses of the vaccine, whereas only 56.5 per cent of South Carolina's total population has been fully vaccinated. That statistic should give the member for Hill pause to consider his comments about vaccination not stopping the spread. That statistic speaks for itself. Our higher vaccination rate has saved countless lives, and the statistics back that up. As we head into winter, I urge everyone to get their booster shot if they are eligible and to make sure their kids get vaccinated as well.

The temporary public health measures supported in this bill will be extended to 31 October 2022 or until the health minister is satisfied that the temporary legislative powers are no longer needed. Right now, however, it is crucial that we retain flexible and rapid public health measures in light of the unpredictable nature of COVID-19 and the risks it can still pose to the public. We could be facing a new variant in the future that is both more transmissible and more severe. Certainly, the Omicron BA.2 subvariant is now on the rise and we need to manage that effectively. We may also have to contend with the coming winter of rising COVID cases coinciding with a winter flu season—something that we have not experienced for a couple of years.

While our high vaccination rates have protected most of us from the worst of Omicron, we should not forget that there are still many vulnerable members of our community who are dependent on our public health measures to keep them safe and alive. These public health provisions need to be extended so that our Chief Health Officer and our emergency officers can make directions to limit and respond to the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland.

Most of us are learning to live with this virus and have gone back to living fairly normal lives. Many of us have had it. Our restaurants and cafes are filling up again, people are going back to the office and we are free to travel interstate and overseas. I do have to say: that is one of the reasons I am bewildered by all of the people who have been contacting our offices in the past few weeks protesting this bill. They quite bizarrely claim that we are living under tyranny and that the public health measures trample their freedoms. While they freely walk about the streets outside protesting or sit at their keyboards freely exercising their right to criticise this bill, our doctors and nurses are working in COVID wards—including my own daughter—sweating in full PPE and working 12- to 24-hour shifts treating patients who are struggling for life. Without the public health measures supported in this bill, our hospital workers would be treating thousands more cases and hundreds of lives would be needlessly lost. That is why the extension of these measures is crucial.

Once again, I extend my sincere thanks for their excellent guidance to our leadership team, our chief health officers and all of our amazing frontline health workers. I thank them for making the past two years so much better than it could have been. I give a shout-out to the committee, which did a lot of work on this bill. I acknowledge the chair, the member for Mansfield, and all of the members of that committee. I know that they looked very closely at the bill. We have a really good system in place.

As I said, it could have been so much worse than it was. I feel really privileged every day to be a Queenslander and to be a part of this government. We can stand proud on our record when it comes to our handling of this pandemic. I commend this bill to the House.