




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2022

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

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (3.08 pm): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022 and give my support to its passage. I would like to extend my condolences to those families and friends who have lost loved ones due to COVID. I would like to touch on an issue that the member for Warrego raised about doctors in hospitals during a pandemic. What we saw last night with the federal government was the shameful slashing of funding to our health system and our public hospitals. They have refused to come to the party with all health ministers and departments across the country. They know that every state has a hospital system that is struggling. It is really shameful to see the opposition stand up and keep bleating on about funding for—

Ms Bates interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Order! Member for Mudgeeraba.

Mrs GILBERT: It is really shameful that they do not call on the federal government to stand up and to stand with the states to make sure that every person in Australia has the health care that they deserve. The federal government continually refuse to fully fund places in our universities that target our rural health professionals and doctors. We need to get more places into our universities so that we can train up those young doctors and nurses that want to go out to the rural areas which those opposite represent. Stand with us and make sure we get those places because we certainly need them, and young people want to go out there.

This bill extends the essential measures to support Queensland's public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As we see widespread outbreaks of the Omicron variant and subvariants across Australia, with continued hospitalisations and, sadly, deaths, the need for the emergency powers under the Public Health Act is clear. The extension of powers in this bill is necessary to protect the health of Queenslanders and keep them safe. That is not to say that the impacts of these necessary health measures have not been tough for some in our community, but we must remember things would be a lot worse if restrictions had not been in place to limit and respond to the spread of COVID-19.

In Queensland it has not been about the survival of the fittest; it has been about protection for all. We have seen the devastating effects of not acting early and decisively in other jurisdictions. We know that restrictions will continue to save lives, particularly for our vulnerable communities as we navigate the next few months of unfamiliar territory. This virus is still new. We do not know what is in front of us, and we need to be prepared to be able to act quickly if necessary.

The low number of cases and deaths in Queensland in the recent Omicron wave can be attributed to the Chief Health Officer's considered and measured approach. The Chief Health Officer has used his powers to successfully respond to the COVID-19 emergency, mitigating impacts of borders reopening, quarantine requirements being removed for vaccinated travellers and schools returning, all while COVID-19 circulates in Queensland. The power to issue public health directions remains critical to Queensland's effective response and cannot be allowed to lapse on 30 April this year.

We must remember that Queensland is only in the great economic shape that we are experiencing now because of the ability of the Chief Health Officer to give quality advice to the Premier and to the Minister for Health so that they are able to make short, sharp decisions about lockdowns and mask-wearing where necessary.

During 2019, I remember when it was only Queensland students on the eastern seaboard attending classes while other states were in forced homeschooling to stop the spread of COVID. As assistant minister for health and regional health infrastructure, I would like to once again place on record my thanks to all those who have worked so hard to protect the health of Queenslanders. The work of our hospital staff, frontline workers, paramedics, police, teachers and supply chain workers have all been essential in keeping Queenslanders safe and Queensland functioning during the pandemic.

Last week the Mackay HHS held a lovely thankyou celebration to celebrate a year since opening the Mackay vaccination hub. It was originally situated at CQUniversity, but quickly had to be moved to the Mackay Showgrounds as it quickly outgrew the university accommodation. Thank you once again to all the hardworking staff who delivered thousands of jabs and to the auxiliary support staff who made the flow through the centre quick and efficient for our locals.

The team, under the guidance of the wonderful Julie Rampton, the executive director of COVID response in Mackay, and the pharmacist, Ron Nightingale, fearlessly and tirelessly led the charge. They not only ran an efficient hub but also coordinated pop-up hubs at shopping centres, Bunnings, schools, sporting events and festivals, and we all joked that if there was a bloke down town with a guitar, they would have a team there popping up to jab anybody who stopped and listened. Every time there was some event going on, they were there. The weather up my way has been hot, steamy and uncomfortable in a lot of these outreach locations. When I visited, there was Julie and Ron there supporting their staff. They made sure that they were out there doing the tough work that they were asking the nurses and other staff to do. I want to thank them all for their commitment and their drive to save lives.

The COVID testing team also turned up to the celebration because their hub is also in the Mackay Showgrounds. They are also out there working in hot PPE in the steamy North Queensland summer weather. They are not complaining; they are just getting on with it. For that, I thank them.

For those who think that COVID is a thing of the past, the team was telling me how more and more people are getting out to festivals and travelling around and they have seen a jump in presentations at the testing centre. They are finding that the positive results are rising, so we cannot let our COVID radar down.

I would just like to say that everyone has the right to protest in a respectful way but, unfortunately, in January this year a group of similar protesters to those who we have seen outside parliament recently took it upon themselves to rampage through a local shopping centre in Mackay, all in the name of freedom. Within the shopping centre, they terrified families doing their Saturday morning catch-ups with friends at coffee shops or just doing their shopping. Parents had to whisk their terrified children out of the centre. Frightened shop assistants closed their stores with frightened shoppers taking refuge in their stores. It was just terrible. Parents and grandparents told me that they were yelling anti-vaccination slogans at their small children. The staff at the pop-up vaccination centre were the focus of their protest. Just imagine the noise that was being made outside here inside a closed shopping centre. The mob was harassing the workers who were carrying out their duty at the pop-up vaccination hub. All people that are carrying out work should be able to do so without fear. Three protesters were arrested that day.

Those members in this parliament who have been supporting the protesters outside need to stand up in this House and condemn the out-of-control actions of rogue members from their group. We have no problems with those who are protesting peacefully.

I also want to send out a huge thankyou to every person who has been vaccinated, worn a mask or taken a COVID test when they have been feeling unwell. They have contributed to ensuring that COVID numbers remain low in Queensland. I thank everyone for continuing these efforts to keep themselves, their families and their loved ones safe.

While Queenslanders have come out in force to be vaccinated, unfortunately our children are lagging behind. I urge parents to get their children vaccinated to protect them and their elderly relatives. While it is mostly mild for children, they are not immune to serious disease, so we need to get them vaccinated.