




Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (12.12 pm): The Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is largely uncontroversial. It seeks to make a variety of changes to nine pieces of legislation within the health and environment portfolios. I wish to speak to a few of these changes.

The proposed amendment to the Hospital and Health Boards Act will enable additional allied health professionals to access Queensland's health patient information system. It will allow certain designated persons and prescribed health professionals to diagnose confidential information to a person performing functions under the Mental Health Act 2016. As my colleagues have mentioned, we will always support initiatives that improve patient access to health care. I truly hope that the government will keep their word and that this initiative delivers the promised improved patient access to health care. However, given the Labor government's history when it comes to implementing IT projects within the health system, I think there are many in this chamber with grave concerns. Let's look at the state government's track record for a minute.

They bungled the electronic medical rollout, blowing out the project costs by close to \$300 million and the project itself is now on ice; they wasted \$70 million of taxpayer money on an inactive pathology system. What about the \$135 million purchasing system that crashed two hours after being turned on? Then there was the biggest bungle of all, the Queensland Health payroll debacle: \$1.2 billion of taxpayer money gone. That is a history that records failure after failure when it comes to IT projects, and it has cost the taxpayer a total of \$1.755 billion.

It is my sincere hope that the state government's track record does not play out again and that the patient information system initiative will be a success.

Mr Skelton interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Order! Pause the clock. Member for Nicklin, please cease your interjections.

Mrs GERBER: The bill also amends the Mental Health Act to improve, among other things, administrative requirements. If one thing has become abundantly clear throughout the COVID-19 pandemic it is the prevalence of mental health concerns and the need for better government support in providing mental health services. Our superstar health practitioners are doing their very best, but they must have the services and resources available to them so they can provide the best level of care to Queenslanders. This is one of the many reasons I have been so vocal in relation to the current health crisis. The opposition have talked with the community, we have talked with stakeholders and we have proposed solutions. However, the Palaszczuk Labor government continues to turn a blind eye.

Just last month we saw mental health nurses in my electorate become yet another casualty of the state government's inability to manage Queensland's health system during COVID. The Gold Coast University Hospital's mental health ward did not have enough personal protective equipment to be adequately prepared for the reopening of our state borders and staff were left vulnerable when hand sanitiser and alcohol cleaner for workspaces ran out. It was clear that this state government did not

properly plan for COVID-positive mental health patients in our hospitals despite having two years to prepare. Instead, the Premier and the health minister left our hardworking nurses in the mental health unit at the Gold Coast University Hospital exposed and unsupported.

While this bill makes administrative clarifications and improvements to the Mental Health Act, too many Queenslanders are currently missing out on the vital services they need. Every day vulnerable Queenslanders desperate to access mental health support are waiting months for an appointment, and presentations to emergency departments are reaching unprecedented levels. We have been putting our solutions on the table. The state government could start by looking at what is being achieved in other states and territories. Other states are prioritising mental health funding because they know the impact it is having on our communities. Sadly, the Queensland Labor government is not doing the same. I will continue to raise it every day in this chamber until something is done by the Palaszczuk Labor government about it. For the sake of all Queenslanders, cultural changes need to be implemented and mental health services need to be better supported, because Queenslanders are falling through the cracks of this hidden pandemic.

This bill also amends the Ambulance Service Act 1991 to align with the requirements for managing confidential information in the Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011 and to remove a requirement that the Queensland Ambulance Service Commissioner be no older than 65 years of age. Whilst these amendments were no doubt necessary, the state government has an ambulance ramping crisis on its hands that it is not dealing with.

Last financial year paramedics spent 112 hours stuck on a ramp. That is the equivalent of 4,600 days, or more than 12 years. It is a 76 per cent increase on the previous financial year. Now data from September and October alone show paramedics spent almost 20,000 hours stuck on a ramp waiting to off-load patients at hospitals across Queensland. This is data that has only just been revealed, mind you. This comes from a government that is all talk when it comes to integrity and transparency, but when we asked the health minister to release this data she initially claimed it was not a reportable measure. The minister tried to avoid showing Queenslanders this damning data. You cannot fix a problem whilst trying to hide it.

Queenslanders deserve to know the true state of ambulance services in our state. These figures lay bare the extraordinary failings of this government. Our dedicated doctors, nurses and paramedics are heroes holding our hospitals together during this health crisis.

The LNP has spent the past year putting forward positive solutions to fix the Queensland health crisis, especially as it becomes increasingly clear that the health system has been in decline for the past seven years and the state government is not keeping up with population growth and demand. The LNP has been leading the charge for real-time data in our hospitals, improving triaging and investing in more beds. We have been leading the charge for empowering frontline clinicians to make local decisions to ensure hospitals run smoothly. This is on the back of record high waiting lists, with an estimated 245,000 patients on the waiting list for the waiting list. Emergency department wait times are going through the roof and surgery waiting lists have ballooned. All of this was before COVID even became a concern.

Unfortunately, it is yet another example of how the Premier and her government are only interested in controlling how things look and not how things are. The state government is not listening and has not acted, and this bill is a missed opportunity to fix the Queensland health crisis. It is clear that our dedicated doctors, nurses, paramedics and allied health professionals are the ones holding our hospitals together while the state government fails to properly resource them. Instead, the Premier and her government choose to focus on the public perception of the health crisis rather than just getting on with the job of fixing the problems plaguing Queensland Health.

I know we cannot gloss over the administrative processes, but in my view it is not enough to just alter these administrative requirements and conduct information campaigns, as suggested in this bill. All Queenslanders want to see is a better healthcare system in Queensland. Queensland healthcare workers and Queensland patients deserve more than just improved administrative processes. Queenslanders deserve real, tangible actions to fix the Queensland health crisis.