




Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (12.56 pm): I want to start my contribution to the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022 by acknowledging those in our community who have suffered the most as a result of the powers in this bill: those who lost precious time with sick loved ones, those who did not get to say a final goodbye, those who lost livelihoods, their careers, their opportunities, their businesses, their income and those who have suffered with mental health problems because of this virus. The silent pandemic of mental illness is one of the many unquantified costs of COVID-19 which I fear will have a far-reaching impact for many years to come.

I also wish to take a moment, like others in this House, to acknowledge all of our healthcare workers who fronted up to work every day to face a disease that at the time nobody knew anything about. They took on whatever risks were present to help and protect others. I cannot image the fortitude it must have taken to spend whole shifts in suffocating PPE gear, to go to work knowing you might be the only support person for a suffering COVID-19 patient, pulling double and triple shifts away from your own loved ones, to hold Queensland's failing health system together. To every single healthcare worker, from aged care to our hospitals, I am so thankful for your sacrifices and for the incredible work that you continue to do.

The bill before the House today is a very important one. There are many members of my community with passionate views on the decisions the state government has made. I thank each member of my community who has contacted me to share their views. I have reviewed all of them. As an opposition, as the Liberal National Party, we have carefully considered the extension of powers bill. This bill gives the Palaszczuk Labor government an unprecedented amount of power with little to no oversight, no checks or balances, no accountability. It is an extraordinary piece of legislation because of its impact on lives, on businesses, on jobs and on families. It impacts every single Queensland, every business and every sporting group.

My community already knows all about this government's lack of accountability and double standard when it comes to restrictions. Currumbin constituents were locked out of our state and prevented from coming home for months while footballers and their wives were let in. The Premier refused to meet with our border business community when they were hurting the most, instead staging a photo-op to give the appearance that her government cared. When border restrictions did ease we were promised a plan for the border community in the so-called border reopening strategy, but we did not get one. Our community has spent the past two years trying to navigate the chaos and confusion caused by the Palaszczuk Labor government's restrictions and double standards. Businesses suffered, locals lost their jobs and our border community was completely abandoned by the state government. With this bill the state government is again proposing to extend its extraordinary powers.



Mrs GERBER (Currumbin—LNP) (4.00 pm), continuing: As I was saying before the break, with this bill the state government is again proposing to extend their extraordinary powers without giving Queenslanders the transparency or the plan they deserve. They still refuse to release the expert medical advice used as the rationale for COVID-19 restrictions, despite two years of requests from the LNP.

Giving Queenslanders this transparency would ensure the state government is accountable to the people of Queensland for the decisions and restrictions imposed on them. This is not a unique request. Governments interstate such as Victoria regularly release meeting minutes and correspondence between the minister and the Chief Health Officer to justify restrictions imposed. That is what my community want. That is what they deserve—transparency, honesty and accountability.

My community also want this government to hold up their end of the bargain. We now find ourselves in the position where the state has reached the 90 per cent vaccination target. In fact, Queenslanders have surpassed this goal. At this milestone we were told by the Palaszczuk Labor government that restrictions and mandates would be reviewed, but the Labor government have sat on their hands. Over the past two years our communities have displayed an extraordinary level of trust in the state government—wanting to do their part to flatten the curve until we all had an opportunity to be vaccinated. It is time that that trust was returned.

The vaccination rollout was hampered by the Palaszczuk government's mixed messages around the AstraZeneca vaccine and the Premier's refusal to have it. Lots of work needed to be done to restore public confidence in the vaccine. I played my part. I chose to be vaccinated with AstraZeneca. Our Currumbin community played their part too, achieving the 90 per cent vaccination target at the start of this year.

The measures governments take must be proportionate with the risk. The risk has changed, both as the virus has evolved and because of our high vaccination levels. I am not talking about the expert medical advice from the AHPPC regarding vaccinating healthcare, disability and aged-care workers. The advice from the AHPPC should be followed. I am talking about the restrictions and mandates in settings where there is no recommendation from the AHPPC and that should be reviewed now we have reached the 90 per cent vaccination target. I know that the people who are most affected by these mandates right now are in the minority given the high vaccination rates statewide. It is the role of government to govern for all Queenslanders. Even if policies only impact a few, it is imperative that they are reviewed stringently.

I know those opposite will try to twist what I am saying to suggest that I am against vaccines. Let the record reflect that I support vaccination and I have done everything I can to ensure that every one of my constituents has had the opportunity to be protected through vaccination. Regardless of whether or not we agree or disagree with mandates and restrictions, we were all told that at 90 per cent the restrictions and mandates would be reviewed. As a state and a community we have held up our end of the bargain. We have done everything that was asked of us and more. It is time the Premier and her government held up their end of the bargain.

It is because of this that the LNP will move key amendments to this bill that will make it mandatory for the Chief Health Officer to publish the health advice on which a direction has been made as soon as practicable. Our amendments will see oversight of the emergency powers in the form of a parliamentary committee. Our amendments will see that the state government's extraordinary powers expire on 31 May rather than the proposed date of 31 October.

The LNP amendments are a sensible approach to the transition away from mandates and restrictions. They ensure transparency and accountability and they balance the need to respond to an unprecedented health crisis with the need to ensure the extraordinary government powers are not in place for a moment longer than necessary. Without the amendments proposed by the LNP, without oversight, without checks or balances, without accountability, without the government response being proportionate to the risk, this bill does not serve the people it is meant to serve—the people of Queensland. I cannot support it.