




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 15 March 2022

**POLICE LEGISLATION (EFFICIENCIES AND EFFECTIVENESS) AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (12.31 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Police Legislation (Efficiencies and Effectiveness) Amendment Bill 2021. I put on record my appreciation for the women and men in the blue uniform who do a sterling job on a daily basis. This was particularly evident throughout the COVID period, the ongoing COVID situation that we face in this nation and state and during the recent flood event. We see officers on the streets who are proudly and effectively making sure that we are cared for and are able to sleep in a relatively safe environment on a nightly basis.

I thank the chair and members of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee for their work in examining this legislation in the committee hearings that took place before this bill came back to the House.

The Palaszczuk government has always been a strong supporter of the Queensland Police Service and its members; that has been reflected on many occasions. We know how critical this high-performing service is to the people of this state. We know how important it is for police to know that we have their backs as well. I tell them that on a regular basis when I engage with my local police station in Ferny Grove. I take pride in the way that I have personally supported police. I supported them as a representative of the Queensland Police Union of Employees; as an industrial advocate in the Industrial Relations Commission; at medical assessment tribunals at the workers compensation board; and in workplace health and safety. I acknowledge Ian Leavers and Mick Barnes for their leadership of that union and for the sterling work that they do.

It is my privilege to serve as the acting Minister for Police on the rare occasion that my ministerial colleague takes some leave. I take pride in this role, given that my father was a serving police officer who retired at 55 as a sergeant 2IC. He went through phases of wearing the khaki uniform and then the blue uniform. I remember him making me smile when he returned home safely. Like many in this chamber, I always respect and admire the work police officers do, the courage they show and the professionalism they exhibit.

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested many of our state services, and our Queensland Police Service has been no different. We only need to look at the vital roles that they played in supporting the COVID safety measures that the government put in place based on the health advice of the Chief Health Officer. While those demands have lessened somewhat, we know that the pressure and the demands on the force remain. Their duties range from fighting organised crime to targeting those in the community who would seek to do our state and nation harm, addressing the scourge of domestic violence, keeping our roads safe and ensuring communities are supported.

This legislation will play a vital role in ensuring our police can continue to meet and exceed our community's expectations. The ability of our Police Service to be efficient, to use up-to-date policing technologies and to adapt to evolving community standards is vitally important. Enabling senior police

officers to witness affidavits will be an important efficiency measure. Currently many hours—thousands each year—are lost with officers needing to find and visit a justice of the peace or a commissioner for declarations to make appropriate affirmations to verify documents. This will be a natural evolution of the current process and it follows previous initiatives to cut down on the amount of police time that is lost. We know that police join the Police Service to catch criminals, and this aim is best served by spending less time dealing with paperwork and more time catching criminals. This measure will bring state legislation into line with the Commonwealth legislation that allows police officers to witness statutory declarations. Court proceedings that require affidavits of proof of service of documents can be time consuming because of the sheer volume of documents that are required in these proceedings.

The process of police opposing bail is often for critical community safety reasons, and it is therefore vital that we make that process as smooth as possible while ensuring all of the appropriate legal protections remain in place. With a 2020 analysis of more than 6,000 bail affidavits showing the time taken to find and access a JP averaging 60 minutes and sometimes up to two hours, it is clear that we need a process that does not see police potentially unable to oppose bail for dangerous offenders because of an access issue. Enabling senior police to do this removes this obstacle in many cases. We need our police officers to be free to do their job, not spending large chunks of their shifts driving back and forth to have paperwork signed.

In another example of how the realities of modern society have moved past existing legislation, under current legislation a police officer requiring a prescribed authority must either have the approved authority delivered by fax or have the terms of the approved authority described to him or her while the officer writes it down. Amendments in this bill will allow for applications for a prescribed authority to be sought by phone, fax, radio, email or other appropriate form of communication if the officer deems that the circumstances are urgent. This is a practical support for our police officers because it means they can use the technology available to them to get the job done when it needs to be done. Practical measures like these are about making it easier for our police to do their job. They are proud of what they do, they do an excellent job and they should not be bogged down in older technology in the process of carrying out their duties.

Sensible and effective firearms laws are important to community safety in Queensland. This bill's amendments to the Weapons Act provide for important efficiencies in the administration of important processes in this regard. It will allow for non-sworn technical officers to make technical contributions to documents prepared for court proceedings, such as providing technical assessment of the firearm category that a weapon might fall into. Another important measure is the extension of the period that a weapons licence holder can hold a weapon for another person, from three months to six months. These provisions exist for cases in which a weapons owner suffers a serious health condition or is subject to extended legal matters that preclude the owner from holding the weapons. This provision can also apply in the cases of deceased estates, where it can often take more than three months for estate matters to be finalised or resolved. This is commonsense, compassionate and more efficient in that it will save the paperwork for multiple applications and approvals.

We know that the opportunities that have been created through digital technologies have seen incredible advances in medicine, in business and in recreation in Queensland and, indeed, across the world. We also know that criminal groups, individuals with criminal motives and those who would prey on the vulnerable have also used these technologies to advance their criminal endeavours. One impact of this legislation will be to streamline the process of accessing the communication devices of alleged offenders where there is a reasonable belief that they contain evidence of certain offences. Those can include evidence of the distribution of intimate images, observations or recordings that are in breach of privacy or distributing prohibited recordings.

I cannot let this opportunity pass without praising the incredible work our police do in my electorate of Ferny Grove. The officer in charge, Jeannie Murray, and all her fellow officers at that station do an excellent job. They can be seen out on the road on a regular basis. I take pride in my engagement with them over several times throughout the year. I will never stop that process and I am sure many of the members in this chamber would do the same thing. It is always a privilege to hear firsthand some of the challenges they face and the pride they take in their work on a daily basis keeping us safe as citizens of Queensland. This bill shows why it will always be important work of this chamber to always be looking to do things better. When it comes to police processes it is vital that we ensure legislation continues to support our police and keep up with a changing society.

In conclusion, in response to the member for Lockyer's comments about policing and resources, as we heard today in the ministerial statement from the minister, Labor has committed to record numbers of police: 2,000 police. I reflect on the time when those opposite were last in government. They actually sacked commissioned officers. They diminished our regions in terms of support of senior ranks of our Police Service. That is the legacy of those opposite. You will never see that coming from

this side of the chamber. We support our women and men in the blue uniform and will continue doing that on a regular basis, whether it be support through resources or boots on the ground. That is what Labor governments do. I commend this bill to the House.