




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (7.51 pm): I rise tonight to speak on the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022. It is without doubt that the last two years have been unprecedented in my lifetime. It is something that has had a devastating effect on our state, on our nation and, in fact, on the whole world. It is nothing that we have seen for over 100 years.

It is important at this time to acknowledge those families who have been impacted greatly by coronavirus—those who have lost loved ones and those who have fallen very ill. There is no doubt that it has had a devastating effect on families in Queensland but also families all around the world. I also want to acknowledge those who have lost their livelihoods. Many businesses, particularly those in the travel and hospitality industries, seem to have been struck by blow after blow due to the restrictions that applied at the time and the disruption to everybody's everyday lives. I acknowledge those who could not be with their loved ones at a time when they were most needed—when they were ill or dying. I acknowledge those who could not attend funerals and those who could not have weddings the way they always dreamed of. I acknowledge the enormous disruption it has been to every aspect of our society.

I pay tribute to our health workers—the nurses and doctors. I pay tribute to those working in our vaccination centres that have been crazily busy for months and months on end. I can only imagine the stress that they went through. It is important that we pay tribute to those people.

There is no doubt that these have been extraordinary circumstances. Extraordinary circumstances require an extraordinary response. I am not sure what the government has been raving on about, but that is why the LNP opposition has supported the laws that have been in place over this period of time giving unprecedented powers to the government and the Chief Health Officer. These were powers that were necessary for the circumstances of the day. These were powers that were necessary to maintain public health standards. These powers were always meant to be temporary. As much as these powerful laws were necessary, at some stage they must come to an end.

The position that Queensland now finds itself in is very different to when the House debated the extension of these powers in August last year. At that point the vaccine rollout in Queensland was still ramping up. The legitimate cry went out for people to be vaccinated. The target was 90 per cent—90 per cent of the state's adult population to have a double dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

The Queensland public responded to what was asked of them. They were assured at the time of the request that this 90 per cent threshold would provide the protection that the community needed. The Palaszczuk-Miles-Dick government asked the Queensland population to show goodwill. What we are now asking of this government is that it extend that goodwill back to the Queensland public. It is time for the Queensland government to fulfil the commitments that it made to people when it made this request for people to be vaccinated. They stated that once we got to the 90 per cent double vaccination rate there would be a review of these restrictions. It is now time to look to the future. It is the responsibility

of this government to provide a step-by-step road map, grounded in expert advice, that shows Queenslanders a path out of this pandemic. Queenslanders still have no clear path forward. Queenslanders deserve to know what the plan is.

That is why the shadow minister will move very reasonable amendments—amendments that are all about transparency and all about accountability. As has already been mentioned by previous speakers, the first amendment would see these extraordinary powers given to the government extended for another two months. The government then has two months to outline to the Queensland public what a way out of this pandemic looks like. That is a reasonable request.

The second amendment would be, for once, to see the expert health advice received by the Palaszczuk-Miles-Dick government which is used as the rationale in this public health discussion. The third amendment—again, a very reasonable amendment—is to establish a parliamentary committee which would routinely hold hearings with the Chief Health Officer to assess and scrutinise health advice. This is something that has happened in other jurisdictions both in this country and overseas. These amendments set a deadline for the transition away from restrictions.

There is an argument that the Palaszczuk-Miles-Dick government has become comfortable with these powers and does not want to relinquish them. One only has to look at the process for this bill to come to that conclusion. Despite these powers existing for more than two years and with ample time to prepare for a proper and thorough review of the bill, the government has chosen to undertake a rushed process. The committee was given only 31 days to examine the bill. Public submissions were open for barely two weeks and the public hearing with Queensland Health lasted just an hour. Based on these facts alone, the government blatantly treated the committee system and the examination of this bill with contempt. Under this bill, as it currently stands, there is no requirement for public health officials to formally answer questions or for the restrictions to be scrutinised by the Queensland parliament. Should this bill pass without amendment, it would mean that the bill is not scrutinised by the parliament for six months. We believe that to be unacceptable.

With the controversy that has been uncovered in recent months about the integrity of this government, the Queensland public has reason to distrust this government. When we see the issues about the State Archivist, the Integrity Commissioner, the private emails by ministers, chiefs of staff getting government grants, Labor lobbyists and unions having undue influence, contracts awarded without proper procurement processes, is it any wonder—

Mr FURNER: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order pursuant to standing order 236. I ask you to bring the member back to being relevant to the bill.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): There has been some latitude given in this debate. There is no point of order at this point.

Mr MANDER: The point I am making is that this is about trust. This government is asking for an enormous amount of trust to be placed in it. The government's track record, which has been uncovered of late but we have known about it for seven years, shows that they cannot be trusted.

The opposition acknowledges the unprecedented legislative challenges of dealing with the first two years of this pandemic. However, the opposition is also of the view that, in a democracy such as ours, these types of powers should not be in place any longer than necessary. Queenslanders have displayed an extraordinary level of trust—an extraordinary level of trust—in government by giving up basic rights and freedom to control the spread of COVID-19. The opposition is of the view that we have a responsibility to honour this trust by outlining a pathway for the return of these rights and to restore transparency. We believe that it is only by approving and voting for the amendments that will be moved by the shadow minister that this can be achieved.