




Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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Record of Proceedings, 23 February 2022

### **HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (6.51 pm): I rise to make a couple of points on the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. One section of the bill amends the Termination of Pregnancy Act 2018 and the Criminal Code. Whenever we talk about these things it needs to be done carefully and in a considered way. I am seeking the minister's assurance that these provisions will be enacted the way they are written.

This relates to the recognition that any student who may be involved in a procedure or may be requested to be involved in a procedure has the absolute right to exercise their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, just as other health practitioners do. Under no circumstances should it cause any difficulties with their studies or their grades. I do not think anybody should be compelled to be involved in a medical procedure that goes against their conscience. I seek the minister's reassurance verbally that under no circumstances will that happen to anybody in Queensland on any occasion. That is fundamentally important when we are looking to modify this particular bill. Students who are learning how to save lives should be protected from acting against their conscience under any circumstances.

I am also interested in making sure people's rights and freedoms are protected in another area. I am a supporter of the sharing of medical information amongst medical professionals so that people can receive the very best treatment and all medical professionals are aware of people's circumstances, particularly if a patient is unable to communicate or family members cannot be contacted and things need to be done in a rush. I speak of the part of the bill that deals with the Viewer. I would like to ensure that someone who does not wish their medical records to be shared and wants to maintain some privacy around their medical records will also be protected within that system. I absolutely support the medical records being available, but over and above that support I think the patient's right to privacy is fundamental and I would very much like to ensure that that is protected. Those are two things on which I would like to hear from the minister to reassure us that those protections are in place.

Another part of the bill talks about mental health. Forensic patients in terms of mental health is a very difficult thing to manage. The rights and obligations that we as a community have around those patients are fundamental. The people who work in those facilities have a very difficult time managing some of the circumstances that arise. In my electorate we have a forensic ward at Ridley on the Baillie Henderson campus. I have visited that facility. On some occasions it has been a difficult facility for people to work in. In the past there have been security issues which have put nursing staff in fearful positions.

Whenever we are considering provisions surrounding forensic mental health it is very important that this House takes clear note, is very transparent about what it is we are trying to achieve in their favour, and ensures that the processes are there to both protect their rights and ensure they are receiving the treatment that is necessary. I see the bill does that and I am comfortable with what is proposed in the bill. Toowoomba is a place where these patients will come. If problems or difficulties arise, my office is one of the places that will be contacted. I would like to make sure we are getting the legislation correct in and around those forensic patients.

The Baillie Henderson site where Ridley is located is a wonderful site. Queensland Health has 180 acres of land there and it is a wonderful opportunity for us to build a new hospital for Toowoomba. Toowoomba desperately needs a new hospital, although the committee I am currently on is looking at the causes of bed block. There are some things we can do to improve bed block. The simple facts are that the main structure of the hospital that we depend on now is reaching the end of its useful life. Because it will take a number of years to build this facility, it is time now to fund this facility and get on with it. The heritage of the site should be protected. Anything we do should protect the history of the Baillie Henderson site and the historic buildings there. We need a new, modern facility that is fit for purpose to serve the people of Toowoomba and the Darling Downs.

I know that the budget is tight. Again, I look to the minister and the cabinet to seriously consider a PPP process so we can get on with this job. I do not want to see a situation for my community where people lose their life because we do not have the medical facilities available. At the moment the hospital is one of the best performing hospitals in Queensland. The staff do an immense job but they are under pressure. The local ambulance staff do a fantastic job, but we find them ramping. Whilst we can do some things to mitigate that in the short and medium term—and that may well lead to some aged care expansion—the most important thing we can do is look to take that pressure off by building a facility that is fit for purpose and has the built environment that our doctors, nurses and other medical professionals need in order to provide the healthcare services we so desperately want to see delivered on the Downs.

Currently there are a lot of people on the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme who travel to Brisbane to see specialists, receive treatment and do other things. Whilst I fully understand that that may well continue, that skews the numbers in terms of where the need is. It shows that those procedures are taking place in Brisbane, so people might think, 'We need more services in Brisbane.' Maybe we do not; maybe we need those services to be delivered closer to where the patients live. The Toowoomba Hospital looks after a lot of people from the Western Downs. A lot of those people do not want to go to a big city to receive their treatment.

Whichever colour of government it is, we know that this facility will have to be built. We cannot keep limping along with the built environment that we have. Doctors and nurses are performing to the absolute maximum they can and COVID has shown where there are some stresses in the system. It is clear that the hospital is now beyond its use-by date, and that is only going to get worse. For my community's sake, the Baillie Henderson campus needs to have the new hospital built on it and it is quite comfortable with that being done by a PPP, if that is what was decided by the government. I think the people of the Darling Downs are not as interested in how it is funded; they are just interested in it being funded and built.

This bill makes sure that people's conscientious objections are respected, makes sure that people's privacy rights are respected and makes sure that those forensic patients who are in the care of the state at a facility such as Ridley are being looked after. These things are all fundamentally important to the people of Toowoomba and my electorate of Toowoomba North, as is a new hospital for us in Toowoomba. It is desperately needed and I implore the minister to seriously look at it in the very short term.