




Speech By  
**Andrew Powell**

**MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE**

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### HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (12.20 pm): I rise to address the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I echo the words of the previous speaker in encouraging all members of this state to consider signing up to be an organ donor and to share that with their families, as I have. I note that is one of the many amendments that this bill is looking to make to a number of pieces of legislation. I also note, as the shadow minister for health has alluded to, that the LNP will not be opposing this legislation.

I want to put on the record my appreciation for all of the frontline health service workers across this state, in particular those in the electorate of Glass House who work in the Maleny Hospital, the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, Nambour Hospital and Caboolture Hospital—the doctors, the nurses, the physiotherapists, the allied health workers, the administrative cleaning staff, the catering staff: all of the people who work in those facilities across the Sunshine Coast and Moreton Bay region. I also acknowledge the role that our community frontline health service providers play. Our doctors, pharmacists, nurses within the community, our ambulance officers and paramedics all do an amazing job in what is an increasingly stressful environment. We have spoken previously of the chaos and the crisis that is currently gripping our health system in Queensland. That is not of the making of any of those frontline service workers, it is in spite of their fantastic efforts. It is our hope that these amendments produce a better workplace for our frontline health service workers.

I want to focus my attention on the amendments to the Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011 that will require hospital and health boards and hospital and health services to proactively consider ways to support staff health, safety and wellbeing. Where has this come from? The member for Bonney and the member for Moggill said that the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Unions and the Australian Medical Association Queensland have expressed concerns to the government around what is going on in our frontline public health services. I note the submission from the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union to the inquiry talked about the results of their own membership surveys that have identified workplace violence, demanding and dangerous workloads, moral distress and fatigue/burnout as key wellbeing issues for their members. Similarly, the Australian Medical Association Queensland observed that a survey it sends to its members working in hospital and health services, what it calls the resident hospital health check, has consistently received feedback from a significant number of doctors saying that they have experienced workplace bullying or harassment and feelings of stress, with incidents of suicide amongst doctors also being reported. The AMA Queensland passes the survey feedback on to the hospital and health services to keep them informed about staff wellbeing concerns.

We have clearly seen, as has been brought to this chamber previously, practices going on in my part of the world in the Caboolture Hospital. I will refer to a number of *Courier-Mail* articles. The first is written by Jill Poulsen on 3 November 2021 and reports on an independent review undertaken by the Metro North Hospital and Health Service into surgical and intensive care units. It states—

The independent review, ordered in early September and handed down on Wednesday, was sparked after a *Courier-Mail* investigation revealed horror allegations at the hospital; including patients had been killed and maimed as a result of botched surgeries, surgeons were potentially performing operations they were not been trained in and a toxic workplace culture with widespread bullying and harassment.

The article goes on to state—

The report made 19 recommendations, which included empathy training to address claims of a toxic culture, as well as providing training around clinical incident management, report writing, open disclosure, better auditing processes and responding better to patient complaints.

What the report found was rather alarming. To quote directly from the report—

Comments heard during the review indicated that poor leadership, lack of trust and transparency lead to poor morale and ineffective representation of concerns from clinicians in all areas of the multidisciplinary team.

The report also states—

The safety and quality reports provided by Metro North and Caboolture Hospitals do not adequately inform the reviewer about the safety and quality of services of care delivered by the Surgical and Intensive Care department at Caboolture Hospital.

Those findings in that review of the Caboolture Hospital were an indictment. They again showed what has been allowed to transpire under this government. The review backed up whistleblowers' claims that this poor workplace culture had led to widespread bullying and harassment. To further quote from the report—

As a result of poor leadership, and fear of retribution because of past bullying and harassment, responses to staff surveys and suitable representation at meetings saw ineffective participation and inadequate information and feedback about safety and quality in particular.

It also found, alarmingly, examples and evidence of racial and gender discrimination. Whilst it mentioned that these were potentially isolated incidents, they were completely and utterly unacceptable and the administration needed to take further steps to ensure that this did not occur into the future.

That article was followed up by another not long after, written by Jack McKay from the *Courier-Mail* on 17 July 2022, titled 'Letter alleges more failures at Caboolture Hospital'. It states—

A letter purportedly written by a group of doctors from a troubled Queensland hospital have raised allegations of operations being done without assistants and 'negative outcomes' in the 'labour ward'.

It further states—

This letter, dated December 13 last year, warned of 'worsening staffing issues', and claimed the 'labour ward and midwifery department' has been under a lot of pressure and stress in the recent months.

The letter also raises concerns about reduced staffing, and claims there had been an increase in sick days among junior staff—which they alleged meant operations had to be done without an assistant. As our leader, the member for Broadwater, pointed out, we were thankful those who wrote that letter reached out to this government. The article goes on—

He said the state government needed to admit the resourcing at Caboolture Hospital was 'broken', insisting that it deserved to be taken seriously.

It is my hope that the amendments we make in this bill around staff wellbeing will go a long way to addressing what we saw unfolding at Caboolture Hospital. We have had reports for many years of the toxic culture there. Again let me be clear: our frontline workers are doing a fantastic job in the environment that they have been given, with the resources they have been granted by this government, but they need to be looked after. They need to be taken care of.

In particular, this bill makes amendments that make staff wellbeing a visible consideration for planning and service delivery for Queensland public health services, but I note that it does so in a way that accommodates the diverse communities and operating context of our various hospital and health services and our boards across Queensland. In doing so it allows a varied number of wellbeing activities that could be considered, things like wellbeing check-ins, wellbeing monitoring programs, peer support programs, nutritional food options, flexible work arrangements, interventions for prominent health risks like fatigue, vicarious trauma and occupational violence, designing healthy work spaces, promoting staff consultation measures and providing details of how staff wellbeing issues have been taken into account.

I will conclude my contribution to this bill on that last point. It is interesting that the committee members themselves picked up that whilst this is adding a legislative requirement to promote healthy cultures in hospital and health services and their boards, there needs to be ongoing monitoring. We need to determine whether what is being put in place here today is working. We need to check the utility of the measures are implemented. The committee therefore recommended that our hospital and health services and their boards regularly report on their progress on supporting staff health, safety and wellbeing at a minimum in their annual reports. I know that does not lead to an amendment of this bill, but it is certainly something that I hope the Minister for Health is taking on board. It is well and good to put these changes in place, but if we are not measuring whether they are successful or asking our hospital and health services and their boards to report on their efficacy, then it is really a wasted effort.