




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (11.41 am): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. During the final sitting week of last year, on 29 November 2022, the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services introduced this legislation to the Queensland parliament where it was subsequently referred to the Health and Environment Committee for its consideration. On 24 February 2023, the Health and Environment Committee tabled its report with five recommendations, including that the legislation be passed. As previously indicated, this legislation is largely uncontroversial and principally technical in nature. Accordingly, the Liberal National Party will be supporting the passage of this legislation.

This legislation will amend eight separate acts including the Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011 which is primarily in relation to improving staff wellbeing. Those amendments pertaining to the following seven other acts are considered mostly technical. These acts include: the Medicines and Poisons Act 2019, the Recording of Evidence Act 1962, the Mental Health Act 2016, the Public Health Act 2005, the Radiation Safety Act 1999, the Transplantation and Anatomy Act 1979 and Water Fluoridation Act 2008.

Before turning specifically to the amendments that pertain to the Hospital and Health Boards Act, I wish to again acknowledge and place on record my sincere appreciation to all frontline health and hospital staff here in Queensland. Queensland's health and hospital staff are the unsung heroes of our society. These dedicated Queenslanders work tirelessly every day to ensure our communities stay healthy and safe, and they certainly help people in their times of need. Primarily, the amendments to the Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011 seek to strengthen protections for the physical and psychological wellbeing of the public health workforce by requiring Queensland's Hospital and Health Services to proactively consider and implement measures supporting the health, safety and wellbeing of staff of public sector health service facilities.

I wish to particularly acknowledge the submission of the Australian Medical Association of Queensland which, whilst welcoming these wellbeing amendments, also advocated for an independent evaluation of all measures implemented by each Hospital and Health Service in support of the amendments, and that these evaluations be made public on an annual basis. It is very important that transparency is provided there to see not only what is currently occurring across the public sector health workforce but also those changes that are being implemented and benefits that are being achieved.

I would also say in relation to some of the testimony and submission from health professional associations, including the Australian Medical Association, the professional leadership across the professions is very important when it comes to eliminating bullying in hospital and health services. Certainly some of the surveys that the Australian Medical Association of Queensland has highlighted, particularly in relation to junior doctors, is very troubling. We must eliminate the bullying that occurs in relation to junior doctors because eventually they become the senior leaders of the profession, and culturally you cannot have a situation where they have been modelled in a particular way or seen particular behaviours undertaken that then they implement themselves. It has health and wellbeing implications for all of those services, it has health and wellbeing consequences for staff, but importantly we need professional leadership there to assist with that as well.

It also has implications for health workforce recruitment and retention. Sometimes when we see particular hospitals struggling in certain parts of Queensland, again the culture that exists there is very problematic and that is leading to not only a loss of staff but also problems recruiting staff. All of these things are extremely important. Accordingly, I note the comments and recommendation No. 2 of the Health and Environment Committee that—

Hospital and Health Services and Hospital and Health Boards regularly report on their progress on supporting staff health, safety and wellbeing, at a minimum in their annual reports.

That is a very important transparency and accountability measure and one that deserves to be adopted and implemented.

Whilst efforts to improve the safety and wellbeing of frontline health and hospital staff are welcomed, the measures contained within this legislation do not even begin to address the systemic underlying issues that are at the core of staff burnout, fatigue and underappreciation, and that goes to resourcing particularly within many of our hospital and health services; that they are given the equipment, the staffing members and all the other resources to provide patient services.

Queensland's frontline health and hospital staff continue to work in a health system which currently is broken and in crisis. Really, it has to be said again, as it has been said many times, that this is because of the current state Labor government's failure to heal the health crisis here in Queensland. Poor management and a lack of resources have left many health workers across Queensland feeling unsupported and overwhelmed. Just this week, as we have heard in this place, last year under the Palaszczuk state Labor government, Queensland paramedics lost 147,000 hours whilst waiting on hospital ramps, and that is 400 lost hours per day. Despite the many challenges they face every day, under Labor's broken health system our frontline health workers continue to persevere, such is their commitment to their patients. These amendments are welcomed, but they are only just the start. Our frontline health and hospital workers and the Queensland patients they treat deserve a lot better.

As the Liberal National Party shadow minister for education, I wish to also acknowledge that this legislation seeks to amend the Public Health Act to authorise the disclosure of student information from schools to Queensland Health's vision-screening health service to maximise resources to screen children for preventable health issues. Under the measures proposed in this legislation, schools will be allowed to disclose student information to the vision-screening program, following similar processes already in place for dental and immunisation programs engaged by a hospital and health service. These amendments will also enable the vision-screening program to request information from schools regarding families who have failed to return a consent form for their child so that vision screening nurses have the opportunity to directly follow up with families of children who have not returned a consent form, address any questions or concerns the family may have about the program, and/or identify any support that may be required to complete the forms.

As outlined by the Health and Environment Committee in its report, in the year 2021 around 26 per cent of Queensland prep students missed out on being screened because they did not have a consent form returned. Based on average screening rates, this meant that up to 1,400 prep students could potentially have been undiagnosed with a visual abnormality that year. The intent of enabling access to this student information is to maximise the number of children who are screened and allow vision-screening nurses to oversee the consent process for the screening without burdening school administrative staff. I note that whilst this does pertain to the sharing of information regarding young students, Queensland Health will update the consent material and information resources for the program to advise parents and guardians how their children's information may be used.

I also note that this legislation will maintain existing privacy protections for information sharing, with information shared also subject to relevant safeguards under the Information Privacy Act 2009. Furthermore, there will remain provisions for parents who do not consent to the sharing of their child's information with the vision-screening program as well as for school principals to refuse to provide information where they consider such disclosures are not in the student's best interests, for example, if there are safety issues or parenting disputes. These are certainly fair and reasonable amendments and this is why they are supported by the Liberal National Party. Importantly, screening for vision abnormality certainly has an implication for students' learning. Being able to identify those vision abnormalities early and correct them if possible will certainly enhance educational outcomes.

The amendments to the Transplantation and Anatomy Act 1979 to ensure consistent consent processes are implemented for human tissue and organ donations across public and private hospitals are sensible and supported. In a former role I was executive director of medical services at St Andrews War Memorial Hospital and I can attest that this amendment and other amendments to the Transplantation and Anatomy Act 1979 have widespread health professional support.

I would also like to address recommendation 4 in the report, which states—

... that resources for technical and/or administrative support be provided to the Mental Health Review Tribunal to make recordings and/or transcriptions of proceedings.

Those are important for accuracy and transparency. Recommendation 5 in the report states—

The committee recommends that Queensland Health consider, as a priority, the inclusion of all basal cell carcinomas ... and squamous cell carcinomas ... as notifiable cancers in future amendments of the Public Health Regulation 2018.

That is very important not only for data collection purposes but also for population screening and for clinical services planning in the allocation of resources. I certainly am very supportive of those. I would also take this opportunity to encourage all Queenslanders to have regular skin checks. That is the only way we can have early identification of things like basal cell carcinomas and squamous cell carcinomas as well as melanomas and other skin cancers. It can certainly save lives. Finally, I also congratulate the Queensland Cancer Council on all of their work. They do terrific work right across Queensland.

In closing, I thank all stakeholders who contributed to the Health and Environment Committee's consideration of this legislation. I also thank all of the committee members including the deputy chair, the member for Southport, and also the member for Bonney for all of the work they did in scrutinising this legislation.