




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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TOBACCO AND OTHER SMOKING PRODUCTS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (4.01 pm): I rise to support the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill. The bill builds on the Palaszczuk government's 2020 election commitment to strengthen our tobacco laws and increase smoke-free places across Queensland. In the past 25 years, we have seen smoking rates drop, thanks to concerted efforts across all governments—federal and state—and all of the mechanisms that are put in place. They are very different to when I was young, growing up and going to school in the sixties and seventies. The level of smoking amongst adults was something in the range of 40 per cent to 50 per cent. Cigarette smoking has reduced significantly since then, but it did not happen overnight; it took a while.

I remember as a young child going down to the corner store and buying cigarettes for my father and grandfather, uninhibited. Of course, as every good young person would do, there were always a couple spare for you and your friends. I was never a smoker. I never really took it up. I never saw the concept of it. However, my father, God bless his soul, was a three-packet-a-day cigarette smoker. I remember a time when he was very ill and he had to have a hip replacement. He used to tell a story where the doctors said to him, 'Do you want to be down here or up there?', pointing to heaven. He said, 'I want to be down here.' The doctor said, 'Well, you have to give up cigarette smoking.' My father went cold turkey overnight and never touched them again. It was really amazing that he was able to do that.

The smoking rate has reduced. What we have seen is a response to emergency challenges in not only regulating tobacco and ensuring good public health but also we now have vaping coming in. What is happening out in the community happens in our schools, happens in our playgrounds and happens with our children. Schools are not immune to what happens out in the community.

This legislation applies to e-cigarettes, vaping and illegal tobacco stores—they call them chop-chop stores—and we are trying to crack down on those. The bill also means that we are able to respond to these things by including regulations, ensuring that we can respond to what is happening out in the community. The bill will introduce measures to ensure, as much as possible, that young people do not take up this habit which can easily become a dangerous addiction.

I really welcome the parliamentary inquiry into vaping and about what it is. I do not get it. I see a lot of it. I know some members of my family vape. I do not get it, but we want to know what is inside them and I really welcome that committee review.

We will expand smoke-free areas across Queensland, including by extending the children's sports ban to organised outdoor activities such as Girl Guides and Scouts. The bill also introduces smoke-free buffer zones around the perimeter of outdoor eating and drinking places and around designated outdoor smoking areas, or DOSAs. Aren't they interesting places to walk by sometimes? It will also be an offence for a licensee to allow a minor to remain in a DOSA, which I think is a great step forward.

Smoking is currently banned at all Queensland state and non-state schools. I welcome the additional banning of smoking in an area five metres beyond school boundaries, with such bans to include vaping and the smoking of e-cigarettes. I also welcome the addition of car parks next to schools to become smoke-free places, including vaping, as will outdoor markets except in those DOSAs, which you, if you are not smoking, stay away from as they are not very nice. I really do welcome the school car parks becoming smoke-free places.

There have been a number of incorrect comments in this debate from those on the other side of the House claiming that schools are not allowed to suspend students for vaping. To be crystal clear, that is not true. The decision to suspend a student rests with the school. Our teachers and principals are professionals and they will take into account all of the individual circumstances, as no two incidents are the same. They will also be guided by a student code of conduct which is developed in collaboration with the school community.

Let me be crystal clear again: it is not true that students who smoke or vape or smoke e-cigarettes cannot be suspended. That is absolutely a false allegation. What the department has said, and has always said, is that they do not support suspension as a first response to discipline—and that includes smoking and vaping—where another approach is available. The department is doing intensive work with schools to provide that support and has a suite of materials and initiatives. We have to support these schools in an educated framework.

For example, at Elanora State High School on the Gold Coast students identified as using vapes are provided with counselling and support through weekly sessions with a guidance officer, a school-based youth health nurse and the head of student wellbeing. The school also provides a two-week vaping education program, run at lunchtime, to educate students on the harmful effects of vaping and to provide practical strategies to assist them to stop.

I have asked my department to look at the issues of school disciplinary absences, or SDAs, more broadly. I have made no secret of the fact that I am concerned with the level of First Nations students and students with a disability being over-represented in our student disciplinary absence figures. There are also higher numbers than I would like to see in prep. Looking at free kindy for all will help all students to be more school-ready. Maximising learning days is vital. Educating students is vital. I applaud Elanora State High School in what they are doing in relation to this matter. This has been replicated right throughout Queensland. We are supporting them in that. That is why it is a key part of our Equity and Excellence strategy. However, there is an important balance to strike. Teachers, staff and other students deserve to work and learn in a safe environment. If another student is posing a risk to that, then appropriate action should be taken.

Mr Crandon interjected.

Ms GRACE: Can I say to the member for Coomera, instead of interjecting, if you have any evidence, I have—

Mr Crandon interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Member for Coomera, order!

Ms GRACE: I inform the member for Coomera that if he has any evidence, please write to me and we will fix it and work it out. Honestly, we should not be playing politics with this issue. We should not be continually interjecting unnecessarily in a very rude manner.

Mr Crandon: Pot calling the kettle black there, Grace.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Coomera, you are now warned under the standing orders.

Ms GRACE: It is absolutely disgraceful that this message is being perpetrated by the member for Coomera. There is no exception that staff should tolerate any kind of behaviour. I have made it crystal clear what the policy is. This is a real issue; there is no doubt about it. Are we concerned about vaping and e-cigarettes?

Mrs McMahon: Absolutely.

Ms GRACE: Absolutely. Is it out in the community? Can schools control this alone? Absolutely not. This kind of legislation is what we need: stopping the supply. Where are they coming from? They are coming over our borders. We have seen raids already and items being confiscated. We know that when students are found with them in schools they are confiscated. They can go into education programs. Obviously our teachers and principals are professionals. I would never suggest for one second that they do not apply good, balanced decision-making and how they control the discipline in relation to these issues.

Anyone who says anything to the contrary does not understand how schools work. I see the member for Mansfield in the chamber who knows only too well that no two situations are ever the same and schools are free to determine the length of the school disciplinary absence. As I said, there are never two issues that are the same.

Vaping and e-cigarettes are one of those issues that obviously we want to address. I do know one thing, and I will say it again: schools cannot do this alone. We need a concerted effort from all levels of government. We need proper information which the parliamentary committee is looking at. We need to make it unavailable to young people. We need to stop normalising vaping, e-cigarettes and cigarettes, and this bill goes towards stopping that normalisation, which is all part of the process of educating the community.

I have even heard some principals say that when some students are suspended they get a call from the parents saying, 'But it's only watermelon,' or, 'It's only strawberries.' That is not the case. These things are harmful. We will get to the bottom of it. We need to do more than just rely on schools to solve a community problem. I commend this bill to the House because it is a first step in the right direction.