




Speech By  
**Ali King**

**MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE**

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## **HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)**


 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (4.58 pm): With this bill, we see another landmark piece of legislation in support of women introduced by our Miles Labor government during Queensland Women's Week. The reforms in this bill, if passed, will significantly expand access to medical terminations for women living in regional, rural and remote Queensland. On this side of the House, we believe that abortion is essential health care and that women and girls should have access to that essential health care, no matter where in Queensland they live. Whatever the member for Kawana and the LNP may say, these are key healthcare issues for Queensland women. They are not a distraction.

One of my proudest moments was seeing this government pass the Termination of Pregnancy Act in 2018. Removing abortion from the Queensland Criminal Code was the culmination of decades of advocacy, lifting the curtain at last on a dark era of stigma, shame and oppression for women. We have all heard about the raids on clinics, the prosecution of doctors, and the intimidation and surveillance women experienced from police, at a time when they also did not have access to reliable contraception.

Less commonly heard are the stories of the women and girls harmed and killed by unsafe and illegal backyard abortions. Jo Wainer, the editor of *Lost: Illegal Abortion Stories*, estimates that prior to the 1970s around 90,000 Australian women each year had secret abortions and many of them died or were permanently injured. I remember hearing members in this House during the debate on that bill give examples of that happening to their family members.

We know that as recently as 2009 a couple in Cairns were prosecuted for illegally obtaining a medication abortion. While they were acquitted, the risk of prosecution resulted in fewer doctors providing services. That is where the reforms we introduce today will make the greatest difference. Rural, regional and remote Queenslanders are facing a serious primary care shortage, with communities struggling to train, retain and recruit doctors.

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 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (6.13 pm), continuing: As Queensland Health officials noted during the committee process, nurses and midwives being empowered to administer MS-2 Step will be especially important in the regions. They said that the requirement that only doctors offer MS-2 Step disproportionately impacts regional, rural and remote people. Due to the early time frames during which a medical termination is safe, if a woman cannot get access to MS-2 Step in her community she may have to be admitted to a hospital or clinic for surgical termination, which involves significant costs and travel. For our most vulnerable women, that additional cost and travel may prevent her from accessing the care she needs at all. I often think of Helen Garner's words when she said—

It's an awe-inspiring force, the iron determination of a woman who refuses to bear a child that she knows she cannot mother. Down through the ages, no religious anathema, no legal proscription has been able to weaken the adamant power of her refusal.

Women should not need iron determination to be able to decide if or when they have a child.

Our government introduces these reforms today to make those women's paths easier. Under our Labor government Queensland has come a long way, but to the young Queensland women who have come of age since abortion was removed from the Criminal Code and into our healthcare system I say: your right to access safe and legal abortion without being harassed outside a clinic can all very easily be undone.

Until today the LNP have been very slippery about their plans for women's reproductive rights if they were to form government. We know that at the 2020 election the LNP's key commitment to their hard right allies was to 'review' our laws that make abortion legal and accessible. I will never forget, and I will never let the LNP forget, how they horsetraded women's rights to bodily autonomy to the cooks in Cherish Life. I will never forget seeing elderly women become distressed by the sight of those anti-choice Cherish Life trucks depicting a deceased baby decades after their own terminations and stillbirths. I will never forget the LNP's hateful anti-women corflutes and the hard right activists who stood at our pre-poll booths harassing me and my female volunteers, photographing and videoing us, copying down our numberplates, calling us murderers. The LNP did that. In fact, those corflutes were on LNP A-frames. It was written all over them. Shame! That is what the LNP in Queensland stand for—harassing women and stripping their rights to score cheap political points.

In her contribution the LNP health spokesperson, that self-appointed advocate for nurses, was very quick to talk down the capacity and ability of nurses to appropriately administer MS-2 Step. It is also ironic that the member for Mudgeeraba is using a shortage of regional medical services as an excuse to argue against making more services available in the regions. Of course, what the LNP health spokesperson really means is that she and the LNP do not support regional women having access to abortion services. In truth, the LNP oppose all Queensland women having the right to abortion, and they have demonstrated that yet again by their decision to vote against these laws during Queensland Women's Week. It is very telling.

This is in stark contrast to our Miles Labor government's consistent actions to protect women's reproductive rights and enhance women's access to reproductive health care. Back in 2018, when this government acted to decriminalise abortion, we knew very well that Queensland women faced unequal access to abortion services across our state. Outside of the south-east, only limited and fragile surgical termination services were available. Due to the stigma and risk attached to criminalisation, few GPs offered access to medical terminations via MS-2 Step, so we did not just legalise abortion as health care and move on; we kept working to create equitable pathways for care, because real reform goes beyond changing laws. It is about investing in services and those pathways.

Today we are making these important legislative changes to allow nurse practitioners, endorsed midwives and appropriately qualified nurses to perform medical terminations of pregnancy, but we are not stopping there. We are investing \$1 billion in funding our women and girls' health plan. We are setting up our statewide women and girls' health hotline so that Queensland women can get accurate and timely advice about their health concerns wherever they live. Importantly, we are also committing over \$40 million to enhance women's access to termination services. Our government will always back women's reproductive choice because it is at the very heart of what we believe. The LNP will always attack women's reproductive rights because that is at the very heart of what they believe.

I am also proud to support our nation-leading introduction of midwife-to-patient ratios in this legislation today. These new laws mean that Queensland mums and bubs will be protected by a ratio of one midwife to every six patients, including babies when they are staying in the same hospital room as their parent. I congratulate Queensland midwives and the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union for their dedicated advocacy to achieve this landmark change. We cannot ever forget how, on International Nurses' Day back in 2016, the LNP voted against minimum nurse-to-patient ratios. This Queensland Women's Week, I acknowledge and thank the wonderful Queensland midwives and nurses who are working so hard to care for women in their times of greatest need right across our beautiful state. These reforms will make a real difference to the lives of Queensland girls and women. I commend this important bill to the House.