




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOPER

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CRIMINAL CODE (DECRIMINALISING SEX WORK) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (3.45 pm): I rise to support the bill. In doing so, I acknowledge those sex workers who have contributed to the bill in any way and the agencies supporting them. No worker should have to choose between working safely and working legally, yet the current regulatory environment in Queensland has resulted in just that for sex workers. This bill was informed through the recent work of the Queensland Law Reform Commission which undertook a review into the decriminalisation of sex work in Queensland. Under the current framework there are just two legal forms of sex work in Queensland: sex work that occurs in a licensed brothel and sex work performed by a private sex worker who works alone. In Queensland all other forms of sex work are illegal.

Every worker has the right to attend their workplace free from the fear they will be raped, assaulted, entrapped or enslaved. However, the commission identified that the current regulatory framework stigmatises sex workers and increases a sex worker's vulnerability to exploitation and violence. As one submitter to the parliamentary committee remarked, it is quite common in the sex industry to work alongside a trusted peer so that you are not alone with a client. They stated—

Another common strategy is to let a peer know our current location, and to check in with them to let them know when the client has arrived and left. In Queensland it is currently illegal for me to employ these very basic and common safety strategies.

Another reflected on how the current regulatory framework that restricts advertising for sex workers decreases workplace safety, stating—

It's really important for me from a consent perspective that I am able to describe exactly what services I offer, and what services I don't. It is unacceptable that I am expected to wait until I am alone in a room with a client to explain to them what my sexual boundaries are.

Decriminalisation does not mean that this will be an unregulated industry. In fact, it provides a clearer statutory framework requiring workers to adhere to the same general laws as other work, including laws that govern work health and safety, anti-discrimination, public health, advertising and planning. Sex work is not inherently less safe than any other work. However, any workplace that is unregulated or that operates in a way that increases stigma, shame or abuse is an unsafe workplace.

The committee was presented with compelling evidence from sex workers working in brothels under the existing statutory framework that some licensed brothels were subjecting them to unfair and unsafe working conditions. As one submitter outlined—

Brothels have an unfair pay split 60/40, 40% going to the worker ... and you are told by management to stay on shift for the full 8 hours otherwise you might not get anymore shifts.

The committee heard how some brothels under the current regime require sex workers to remain on shift regardless of whether there are bookings, which means they are rostered on without pay. The committee heard how some brothels under the current regime were refusing reasonable requests from sex workers to decline bookings including because they did not feel they could physically or emotionally complete the service. The committee was told that instead some brothel owners and operators were

insisting they take the booking or their wages would be withheld or their rosters cut. The committee heard how some sex workers were working on fly-in fly-out arrangements and that some brothels under the current regime would withhold their payments unless they complied with all management requests, effectively rendering the sex worker stranded in a remote location without financial or emotional support. This bill will end these practices.

I again acknowledge all of the voices who have informed this reform—many individuals and many advocates, many of whom have been mentioned already in this debate, who have persisted with this work in showing dignity and grace in a debate that has, at times, had ugly moments. I commend the bill to the House.