




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR INALA

Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2024

**ELECTRICAL SAFETY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL;
WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms NIGHTINGALE** (Inala—ALP) (9.21 pm): Tonight I rise to speak in this cognate debate and in my contribution I will speak in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I am proud to support this bill, which represents a significant step forward in the protection and empowerment of workers across Queensland, particularly those in my electorate of Inala. The amendments proposed in this bill address several critical issues and extend essential rights to workers, reflecting our commitment to fairness and justice in the workplace.

The bill includes key amendments to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act that will extend coverage to workers in the gig economy. This is a vital change that acknowledges the evolving nature of work and ensures that gig workers, who often lack traditional employment benefits, will now have greater security and support. This sits in stark contrast to those opposite who voted against changes to the act—changes, I might add, that provide increased worker protections and ensure that businesses cannot simply insure against penalties for breaches of safety laws. Breaching laws in the operation of a business is something with which the Leader of the Opposition seems to have personal experience. However, for the Miles Labor government it is about holding businesses accountable and fostering safer workplaces.

Furthermore, the bill introduces crucial provisions that enhance workers' rights in relation to their medical treatment and rehabilitation. Workers will have the right to choose their treating doctor and now, crazily enough, without the presence of their employer or insurer during medical appointments. It is absolutely crazy to think that an employer or insurer would be present during medical treatment. That not only interferes with the basic fundamental privacy rights of a person undergoing or receiving any health care; it completely disempowers them in terms of their own health recovery. Therefore, I am really pleased to see this change.

Workers will also have the freedom to select their workplace rehabilitation provider if they are dissatisfied with the one chosen by their insurer. This is particularly important for those who have a psychological injury. We know that it can be very difficult to find a clinician with whom you can build the trusting and safe rapport that is necessary to achieve the goals of psychological treatment. This decision will ensure that workers now have the ability to choose the provider who will meet their needs and who will ensure that they work towards recovery together. Additionally, the bill allows workers to seek advice from registered industrial organisations or legal professionals. These measures are about giving workers more control over their own recovery, which is a fundamental aspect of their wellbeing and dignity. That will ensure that workers can maximise their recovery and return to work.

It is essential to highlight that this bill also addresses the needs of our firefighters by expanding the list of deemed diseases that are presumed to be work related, including various cancers such as primary site uterine cancers and other cancers that particularly affect women and that previously were

not included in the list. In doing this we are acknowledging the unique risks faced by our brave firefighters. This is particularly significant as more women enter that demanding, essential and traditionally male-dominated field.

I would like to take a moment to commend Aly Bull, a firefighter from Durack Fire and Rescue Station in my electorate. Aly is a canoeist who recently represented Australia at the Olympics. Well done, Aly. We really appreciate your efforts. Aly's dedication, both in the field as a firefighter and in representing our country on the international stage, is truly commendable. I thank her and I thank all firefighters for their service. Theirs is not an easy job and it is one that we are all so thankful that they do. It is essential that we make sure that they are protected whilst they do their job and as a result of their job.

This bill also improves rehabilitation and return-to-work planning. It mandates that insurers must have a return-to-work plan in place within 10 business days of accepting a claim. It ensures that insurers take all reasonable steps to prevent secondary psychological injuries stemming from physical injuries. As was mentioned by the opposition, secondary psychological injuries are a growing claim area in workplace rehabilitation. We know that the sooner that people can access appropriate care and treatment the better their recovery will be, so this is an important step forward through this legislation. Additionally, the bill provides for an immediate cash flow to injured workers while their weekly compensation is being calculated, further supporting them during their recovery. I know that workers in Inala can least afford to be out of work and out of pocket, particularly for extended periods as has been the case in the past. It will truly be a relief for injured workers in my electorate to know that they can rely on receiving some cash whilst they are waiting.

For over a century, Queensland's workers compensation scheme has been a pillar of support for workers who suffer from workplace accidents. It has protected workers and their families, ensured fairness and promoted workplace safety. This bill builds on that legacy by ensuring that workers receive information at the commencement of employment. It is crazy to think that workers would be expected to seek out that information at the time of an injury, which is a time when they are busy and have to confront dealing with many other issues. It is unreasonable to expect that the onus of responsibility for having this information should be put on a worker during such a time. It would not inconvenience an employer because, at the time of commencement of employment, employers typically give employees a range of documents. Adding information regarding the right to workplace cover will not disadvantage employers and can only serve to advantage the employee-employer relationship and ensure that workers understand their rights should an injury occur. This addition will enhance workers' awareness of their rights, which is especially important for young workers and those from multicultural backgrounds, such as those in my electorate of Inala, who may not be familiar with these protections. It is very difficult to ask your employer for the information if you do not know in fact that it even exists.

The Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 is a testament to our commitment to workers' rights and safety. Again, this is in stark contrast to those opposite, who previously have cut workers compensation and workers' rights. These changes address the contemporary challenges that we face when we have new, emerging industries, as we have seen with the gig economy. It improves protections and ensures that all workers, regardless of their employment status, have the support they deserve.

It is only when workers are taken care of that we can continue to build our economy and provide a workforce that industry and business need to ensure their success and that of our state. This is where Labor shows its strength. Labor is the only party that looks after workers, and Labor is the party that you can count on to ensure that workers' needs are supported and that workers are encouraged and assisted to access the support they need through the mechanisms of legislation such as this. I commend this legislation to the House.