




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Record of Proceedings, 10 September 2024

**RESPECT AT WORK AND OTHER MATTERS AMENDMENT BILL; CRIMINAL
JUSTICE LEGISLATION (SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND OTHER MATTERS)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women) (7.09 pm): I am so proud to rise in support of the Respect at Work and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2024. There is no place for sexual harassment, sexual assault or unlawful discrimination in our communities or in our workplaces. Unfortunately we know these behaviours are widespread and pervasive, with the Australian Human Rights Commission nationwide survey finding one in three people experience sexual harassment at work. One respondent talked about the prevalence in her career—

There is not one position I have held where I have not been sexually harassed. I have been sexually harassed by colleagues, by superiors, by customers ... and by junior men in my own workforce.

As Minister for Women it is appalling but not surprising to me to see that women are sexually harassed at higher rates than men in the workplace and that men are significantly more likely to be the harasser, with 79 per cent of incidents being reported as the harasser being a man, but it is critical to understand that sexual harassment is not just a women's issue; it is a whole-of-community issue. Every Queensland, every Queensland workplace, has an obligation to address this. In the words of former sex discrimination commissioner Kate Jenkins—

Workplace sexual harassment is not inevitable. It is not acceptable. It is preventable.

The bill amends the Anti-Discrimination Act to provide greater safeguards for Queensland workers. Importantly, it introduces a positive duty on employers to eliminate workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and sex-based harassment or subjecting a person to a hostile workplace environment on the ground of sex. To achieve this, employers must shift their focus to actively preventing workplace sexual harassment and discrimination rather than responding only after it occurs.

Currently in Queensland Health we have a comprehensive independent review underway to identify the strengths of Queensland Health systems for ensuring safe working conditions and to identify any areas that may need further development. The review is being led by Australia's longest serving sex discrimination commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick AO. This is part of the Queensland government's commitment to being a model employer and to ensuring we foster safe and more supportive workplaces for Queensland Health's frontline workforce. It is the kind of proactive action that is required to make sure we have the right systems in place to address sexual harassment, sexual assault and unlawful discrimination in one of Queensland's largest and most dispersed workplaces. Importantly, this bill includes consequences if businesses fail to comply by empowering the Queensland Human Rights Commission to investigate compliance with this duty, issue compliance notices and enter into enforceable undertakings.

All Queenslanders deserve to feel safe in their workplace and supported appropriately when reporting harassment, but we know that fewer than one in five people who experience workplace sexual harassment make a formal report or complaint about it. Disturbingly, those who did report were labelled as a troublemaker, ostracised, victimised or ignored by colleagues or resigned. The impacts of this cannot be understated. One respondent stated—

Each time I laughed along with my own humiliation or kept quiet about the humiliation of another woman or marginalised person, I died a little bit more on the inside.

The people of Queensland deserve safe, inclusive and respectful workplaces, and this bill serves as a testament to the Miles Labor government's steadfast dedication to making sure that our workplaces not only are physically secure but also foster the mental and emotional wellbeing of our valued workforce. I am so proud to be part of a government that is delivering this historic reform. I commend the bill to the House.