




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION NATIONAL LAW AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (12.32 pm): The Labor opposition has always stood up for laws that protect Queenslanders and always will. Whether you are at work or at home or receiving care in a hospital, feeling safe and being safe should not be optional; it is absolutely fundamental. It is the government's job to take the steps needed to make that safety a reality. The Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, introduced by the former Labor government, was designed to increase transparency and ensure the public knows when serious disciplinary action is taken against practitioners for sexual misconduct. It also introduced vital protections for those who come forward or assist in investigations—people who deserve to be safe and supported when speaking up. The national law provides a framework that strengthens our ability to respond to sexual misconduct in health care, ensuring patient safety and, most importantly, upholding public trust. It is about guaranteeing we hold perpetrators of sexual misconduct to account and improve how our systems respond to these complaints.

During my time as health minister I was proud to introduce the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law. One of the core objectives of this bill was to create transparency with Queenslanders about how cases of sexual misconduct were dealt with in the public health system. We abolished the use of non-disclosure agreements for sexual harassment cases and strengthened a registry for those accused of serious sexual misconduct, because we wanted to create an environment of transparency and safety.

So often in our society, there is negative stigma associated with making complaints about sexual misconduct. Victims are often ashamed and scared to speak up. This is still an issue right here in Queensland—right here in Queensland Health. During my time as health minister I commissioned an independent review of sexual harassment and sexual misconduct policies and procedures in Queensland Health. The findings of that report were quietly released last week and highlighted a greater focus on trauma informed responses to sexual conduct complaints. The report listed an array of recommendations for Queensland Health, including leadership training and further development of prevention plans for leadership and management. Interestingly, the LNP government has not spoken about this report or its findings since its release.

It should come as no surprise that that report also states that the review that was undertaken was well timed because last year the Respect at Work and Other Matters Amendment Bill was passed by the Queensland parliament. We all know that those amendments were due to come into effect on 1 July this year. They were used as a key marker in that statewide review of sexual safety in Queensland Health which drew comparisons to those laws throughout the final report. As all members know, the LNP government has made the decision to indefinitely pause those critical reforms that protect Queensland health workers, and workers right across the state, from sexual harassment at work. That decision stands in direct conflict with the recommendations from Queensland Health's independent review into sexual harassment and sexual misconduct.

For the health minister to come in here and argue that sexual harassment does not form part of sexual misconduct is absolutely shocking. I would draw the attention of the health minister to page 12 of the committee report, which outlines a whole lot of behaviours that form part of sexual misconduct, including making sexual comments, suggestions or gestures; engaging in sexual humour or innuendo; and sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment. The health minister needs to get his head around what constitutes sexual misconduct if he is to have any hope of protecting Queensland health workers from sexual harassment in the workplace. He could start by picking up the phone to the Attorney-General and saying, 'Let's commence those important positive duties on workplaces to prevent sexual harassment.' That would actually protect a whole lot of workers, not only in Queensland Health but also across Queensland, because almost every woman has at some time in their life experienced sexual harassment and one in four men report sexual harassment. If this government is actually serious about tackling sexual misconduct when it comes to Queensland Health and consumers or tackling sexual harassment in the workplace, it should absolutely not indefinitely delay those important reforms and get on with it, because they are important reforms for Queensland workers.

I am so disappointed, once again, that the health minister could not even bring himself to say that sexual harassment forms part of sexual misconduct. It is embarrassing and it is shocking and sends a dangerous message to Queensland workers, especially Queensland women. We should be doing everything we can to protect workers, particularly when it comes to sexual harassment and sexual misconduct. The Labor opposition will, of course, support these amendments, because we know that every Queenslanders deserves to feel safe at home, at work and everywhere else in the community. It should be non-negotiable. The LNP government cannot say the same, as this bill completely contradicts their decision to pause respect at work laws. Those opposite should be absolutely ashamed of abandoning Queensland workers.